Everyday Stories:

Exploring A Storytelling Curriculum In Kindergarten

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Education

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

For a degree of

Master's of Education

University of Prince Edward Island

We accept the thesis as conforming

to the required standard

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October 18, 2014

Abstract

This study investigates the use of Vivian Paley's storytelling curriculum in a kindergarten classroom with an action research approach. The teacher and children engaged in storytelling activities that included telling the story, scribing the story and acting out the story. The play acting was recorded on video for future reflection by teacher and students. The findings of the project revealed that the storytelling curriculum allowed the children and the teacher to learn about language and literacy based on the interests of the children. The study also found that the storytelling curriculum supported an emergent, play-based curriculum. It was determined that this narrative approach allowed reflection on learning together, and deepened the children's and the teacher's understanding of literacy and of each other. Throughout the investigation it was discovered that the storytelling curriculum provided opportunities for authentic assessment. These benefits are recognized as threads that weave together to make a rich literacy "mat" that enriches the kindergarten classroom.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the contributions and support of a community of advisors, fellow educators, friends, and family.

For excellent guidance and for their belief in my research and my process I would like to thank Dr. Martha Gabriel and Dr. Lyndsay Moffatt. Martha's insights, understanding of qualitative research, and careful attention to detail informed every part of my thesis process. Her firm hand and step by step approach guided my global learning style. Lyndsay's enthusiasm and passion for early literacy shaped and expanded my original thesis. Her thoughtful questions, "edits with love", and positive support caused me to dig always deeper. It has been a privilege to receive Martha's and Lyndsay's excellent mentorship. I am grateful for their excellent teaching and for their generosity as friends.

In the very beginning of this thesis project, Dr. Carla DiGiorgio offered the words that inspired my journey: "Be the change you want to see in the world." - by Gandhi.

I thank Dr. Carol Anne Wien, for inspiring me to try Emergent Curriculum and Reggio-inspired teaching with my students. This experience sparked my visit to Reggio Emilia and observation of Reggio Narra which became the seed that grew into this study.

I thank the children and their families who agreed to participate in this project. Without their stories and their enthusiasm in telling them this project could not have gone forward.

For their kindness, friendship, and understanding, I offer my sincere thanks to the Thesis Support Group - Anna Baldaccino, Joanne MacNiven, Brenda Goodine, and Donna Wigmore. I give special thanks to Joanne for her insight edits, and all for their positive encouragement.

On a personal note, I give thanks for my parents Brad and Jackie Brownlow. The stories they told when I was a child forged my sense of identity. They taught me about the power of belonging: to family, to tribe, to community. They taught me to value and delight in learning.

I am grateful to my siblings Mary and Weston, and to my aunts Mary Ann and Jane, all of whom offered their constant support throughout this journey.

I am indebted to my sister Gale and her husband George who saw me through the technical challenges presented by modern technology. Gale was always ready with a listening ear, encouragement, hands on help with numbering challenges, and her constant belief in my ability to finish what I began.

The writing of this thesis would not have been possible without the generous contribution of my friend Sigrid Rolf, who allowed me to write from her cabin in the woods -- a quiet refuge for thinking, processing, and writing.

To my friend Verna Lynn Weeks I extend thanks for sharing in the weekly yoga practice that enriched my discipline for writing.

I am grateful for the generous gift of time in reading and editing this work by my friend Marion Coppleston.

I have been constantly sustained by the words of Rob McCall, whose rich grounding in the natural world and wise musings on the spirit world guide me always.

Finally, and most important of all, this thesis could not have been completed without the love, patience and support of my husband Peter and my sons William, Edwin, and Nathaniel, who kept me going with these words: "Just write it Mom!".

Dedicated to

Ms. Brownlow's Little Owlets of 2012-2013

For their exuberant and enthusiastic participation in the storytelling project.

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Noah's Ninjago story

It is a day for a story. Today it is Nat's turn. After recess there is plenty of time to act out Nat's story before lunch. His story is about a time when he and his friends were watching a movie at a small local theater. The movie that day was about LEGO Ninjago. In our classroom the excitement is high since Lego Ninjago is a preoccupation of many children in this class. They live and breathe stories that involve these LEGO characters; they could talk of little else. Nat has chosen his friends to be the animate and inanimate objects in this enactment of that day.

Ollie is on the mat squeezed into a ball, bum in the air ... he has been chosen to be the theatre.

Nat is jumping up and down running back and forth on the mat bursting with excitement because it is his story that we will act out .

Meanwhile, I am trying to contain some of the energy so we can proceed, "So you're the theater, so everyone goes inside of you." And again working to engage everyone, "Shh, time to listen to the story".

I start to read the story Nat dictated to me earlier , "I went to Michael's movie, it was real when I was still in preschool and for real I went to Michael's movie theatre when I was in preschool. Isaac and Harrison and Ollie and Noah were there."

The children are so excited they erupt into laughter and bounce with excitement. Corey squeals in a high pitched, excited voice," I'm Ollie, I'm Ollie."

The boys, Corey, Adam, Nat and Noah tumble onto the mat in front of Ollie, "the movie theatre".

Ms. B, directing the action reminds them, "You're all watching the movie."

Corey, Adam, Nat, and Noah take their place in front of the theatre/ screen. Nat and Noah are up on their knees. They look toward the other actors off the mat and ask, "Where's Ninjago?" They are anticipating their friend Jack who will be the Ninjago character in the movie.

Ms. B. gently reminds them to "Just wait; we haven't got there yet."

Ms. B then directs Jack to take his place in the story, "Ninjago. "

The boys chant, thrilled that soon the movie will come to life with their friend acting it out," Ninjago, Ninjago, Ninjago!"

Ollie stoically continues to be curled up as the still and waiting movie screen in the theater.

Jack runs in but has misunderstood his part." I'm in the TV." And then scooches down next to Ollie "the theatre".

The boys lean forward. Nat tells him what to do next.

Ms. B, helping him understand his part," I think you have to be doing something if you're the movie. Explaining further, "Ollie is the theatre that the movie is being shown in so you might have to do something to pretend you are the movie."

Jack listens and watches carefully as Nat puts his hands up to show him what to do.

Corey suggests, "You might have to go behind." [the theater screen]

Jack jumps behind Ollie and calls out, "They can't see."

Ms. B suggests, "Do you think you should stand up?"

Jack stands with his hands and arms outstretched shrugs with a questioning look, appealing to his friends and Ms. B, "What do I do?"

Ms. B directs, "You do whatever the movie does." Then Nat comes to the rescue and demonstrates with a dramatic flourish of action:

"He has a sword and he cha- cha- cha!" He says as he leaps up and down, arms flinging round and round as he describes the movement of the sword then he falls to the floor and lays on his friends.

Jack then replicates the action yelling out, "Cha coo choo choo ow" and flaps his hands around as if wielding a sword in a mild imitation of Nat then leans on the wall behind. There is a brief reprise and Jack says "Cha cha choo" again and jumps up and down flaps his hands makes silly faces.

Ms. B quietly directs the Ninjago to move off and make the theater ready for the next movie.

Jack shouts out "I am the CD" then puts his arms in front of his face in a circle and skitters off the 'stage' to put his arms and head in the book basket as if putting it away. Although this part of the story is not written in Nat's story, Jack has brought his own understanding of what happens when you watch a movie on a CD: it must be put safely away when you are finished.

Just to make sure everyone knows what he has done Jack raises head from the basket and repeats, "I'm the CD!"

The story continues with two more movies involving sword swinging. There is lots of action, laughter, arms thrown up, and hissing sounds, as the boys sit with the popcorn in front of the movie theatre.

Ms. B finishes the story reading, "And we said AHHHHH"

The boys all say, "Ahh" and lie down on their sides and backs. Now that the story is finished everyone is up off the floor clapping and chatting as they move around the mat.

Jackie,a member of the audience, exclaims enthusiastically, "That was the best one ever!"

Figure 1. Jack becomes a CD

Chapter I: Introduction

> *Storytelling is the oldest form of education. People around the world have always told tales as a way to pass down their cultural beliefs, traditions, and history to future generations. Why? Stories are at the core of all that makes us human.* (Hamilton & Weiss, 2005, p.1)

The purpose of this study is to examine what Vivian Paley's storytelling curriculum can offer early years teachers and their students. In the following pages, I describe some of the origins of this project, the history of the storytelling curriculum and how it was enacted in my own kindergarten classroom. I also discuss how I built on the storytelling curriculum as I used it with my students, using a video camera to record our playacting, and how this added to my research questions.

TeacherRresearcher: My History

To establish credibility for the action research project I conducted, I share a brief outline of my twenty years of teaching in the early childhood field. I have taught for twenty years the last sixteen in kindergarten. Initially I taught in a pre-school and then taught a K-1-2 class. I attended many of the workshops and conferences offered by the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of Prince Edward Island. I found that many of these opportunities engaged me in new learning or confirmed what I was already doing with my students. I was also invited to participate and contribute to the writing of the kindergarten integrated curriculum (2006) for the Prince Edward Island Department of Education. This required some researching of literacy and math expectations for kindergarten children (age 4-6). When this curriculum was adopted, I

worked with a team of mentors for the provincial Department of Education to help educators all over Prince Edward Island implement it. This involved delivering workshops on literacy, math, environment (set up), integration and so on. In addition there were frequent visits to kindergartens for exchange of ideas with educators, and, the delivery of model lessons to children in these areas to demonstrate new integrated curriculum to educators. This work allowed the members of the mentor team to engage teachers in inquiry groups to explore their reflections and to engage in discussions about how they were implementing the curriculum.

During this time emergent curriculum or project approach as a pedagogy (learning based on children's interests) was introduced to early childhood educators on PEI by Carol Ann Wien at an ECDA Kindergarten Conference (Winter 2007). A later visit to my classroom from Dr. Wien further inspired my interest in pursuing an emergent curriculum with my students. To gain a deeper understanding of this approach I attended a study tour in Reggio Emilia, Italy. For me this study tour was an opportunity to observe the Reggio approach first hand. We were immersed in the culture and the philosophy of the schools. The focus was pedagogical documentation. Many examples of this were presented to us but the most inspiring was a video of Reggio Narra which was an inspiration for this study. I discuss this experience in more detail in the next section. I became committed to exploring and using the Reggio Emilia Approach or emergent curriculum in my classroom. An effort that has continued over the past six years.

Recently I delivered a workshop on the story telling curriculum at the winter conference organized by the ECDA. These valuable experiences -- participating in

workshops, working on the curriculum development, and going on the study tour -- have inspired and informed my teaching and certainly have provided a strong scaffold to support my own learning and researching in my classroom. I believe in teaching the whole child, and allowing the interests of the child to lead to paths of investigation. There are many facets to the people we teach and the world we live in. The teachers' work is to facilitate the integration of learning and relationship-building within and beyond the classroom community. We can do this by listening to children's stories and providing invitations to learn.

The Origins of this Project

This research project grew out of two seeds. The first seed was a film called *Reggio Narra,* created by educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Over the last thirty years Reggio Emilia has become an important place for early years educators interested in creating emergent curriculum (Edwards, Gandini & Forman,2012; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Stacey,2009; Wien,2008). The beginning of the film describes the educators' documentation of children's interest in stories, and parents' participation in story-telling. Educators in Reggio Emilia trained some parents to tell stories. Once trained, the parents told these stories to children in the schools. The story-telling approach blossomed into a city-wide event. It became a festival of story-telling, which embraced the many languages of children (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). There were dancers, musicians, puppets, and traditional storytellers, as well as the parents who had received training. This film was so evocative, I was inspired to try storytelling on a much smaller scale in my own practice as a kindergarten teacher on Prince Edward Island. Initially, I was looking for a way to engage parents in their children's learning, which is a crucial

component of the Reggio Approach, or emergent curriculum (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). My investigations into story-telling led me to Vivian Paley's (1981) *Storytelling Curriculum,* in which children tell stories and the teacher uses these stories to enhance writing, narrative development, and their understanding of the conventions of print (Cooper, 2007).

The second seed for this project grew out of some of the changes I have seen in kindergarten literacy education over the past few years. As a kindergarten teacher with twenty years of experience, I have seen a variety of approaches to early literacy education. However, recently I have witnessed some changes that seem to run counter to everything I understand about young children and language learning. As in other places around the world, Kindergarten in Prince Edward Island has become far more "school-like" than in previous decades.

In order to understand a bit of this shift, it is useful to know that until four years ago, Kindergarten was a community based, private enterprise on Prince Edward Island, rather than part of the public school system. In 2009, as we moved into the public system, I began to witness an erosion of the play-based curriculum we had practiced for so long. Instead, I now saw play being replaced with more structured skills-based teaching in areas such as phonics, reading, and writing. While listening, talking, cooking, reading, singing, and playing are widely recognized as developmentally appropriate practices for young children, time for these activities is growing smaller in our new school-based kindergarten classrooms.

The current emphasis on reading and reading comprehension, on word-work (phonics), and writing appears to come with the expectation that time each day will be spent teaching these skills through direct instruction. Previously, these areas would be addressed through meaningful and engaging activities, such as signing in, show and tell, songs, finger plays, and play time, or center time. In experimenting with Vivian Paley's storytelling curriculum, I found myself looking for a curriculum that would offer an antidote to the current push for direct instruction. In this way, storytelling curriculum became the foundation for my research project. The task became a journey of discovery.

In examining the storytelling curriculum, I found numerous benefits and saw many of the kinds of early literacy behaviours that become the building blocks for later reading and writing. In looking closely at the storytelling curriculum. I became even more convinced that guided readers and focused lessons on decontextualized letters or sounds are not the only road to teaching literacy.

In the following pages, I will describe my examination of the storytelling curriculum in more detail using examples from my own classroom. I will present my analysis of data generated over a four month period with a group of eleven 5 year olds attending a public kindergarten in a rural community in Prince Edward Island, Canada. In the next section, I describe the history of the storytelling curriculum, what it looked like in my classroom, and why I felt it merited deeper investigation.

What is the Storytelling Curriculum?

The storytelling curriculum was first described in the work of Vivian Paley in her books *Wally's Stories Conversations In Kindergarten* (1981), *You Can't Say You Can't*

Play (1993), *The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter* (1991), and *A Child's Work: The Importance of Fantasy Play* (2004). In these books, Paley recounts animated descriptions and actual stories from her kindergarten classroom. She describes the unfolding of her relationship with her students and how they were all led to a deeper understanding of each other through the storytelling curriculum. Paley reflects on the children's stories offering insight into the children's thinking and her own. These books provide a lively and delightful window into her classroom, her thinking, and the process of the storytelling curriculum, a process that reveals children's capabilities often far and above what may be accomplished in moments of direct instruction.

The Storytelling Curriculum, as designed by Paley, incorporates listening to children's stories and bringing them to life by acting them out. The process begins with the teacher sitting with the child storyteller, talking to the child about what story s/he might like to tell, and writing it down as it is told. The teacher uses a carbon paper to make a copy so that the child can take one home and one can stay at school. Teachers often prompt first time storytellers with a gentle beginning idea.

When the child begins to tell the story, the teacher writes and echoes back what she hears as she writes. During this period of creating the story, the teacher can help the children expand their story by offering questions to clarify, or enter a conversation about the story and what might happen when it is acted out. While scribing stories, if the child is ready, the teacher can also offer information about writing and concepts of print. Paley notes that while she scribes, she echoes the child's words, and effectively performs a talk-aloud about the concepts of print as she writes. For example, a teacher might say "I am making a capital letter here because that is your sister's name" or "Bouncy, that is

a juicy word! It tells me how it felt". The story is then edited and read aloud to make sure the child feels it is correct.

The next step is to retell the story as a play, with the teacher as the producer and director, and the storyteller choosing the characters in the story and acting the main role him or herself. This process makes the story come alive and involves the children in a play-like activity, which helps them understand the elements of a story and the language that builds the story. During the performance of the story, the teacher reads the story aloud while the cast simultaneously acts it out. When there is dialogue, the teacher often pauses to allow the child storyteller to say the lines, or to direct the action. When the play is over, the children take a bow (Cooper, Capo, Mathes, & Gray, 2007).

In my classroom, I often scribe the stories in the morning when the children come in and the other students are engaged in tabletop activities. Usually, there is time for two or three dictations in a morning. We do the story acting later in the day after lunch. After we have completed one or two stories, and they know what to expect, there are always questions from the children about when we will be able to act out their stories.

These stories and the story acting take place in our own classroom. There is no need for props or costumes. The children's imaginations are more than ample for the creation of these stories. In my room, I have created a kind of stage using dowels suspended from the ceiling and sheer fabric draped over them to create a canopy. This canopy makes a boundary over the mat, creating the idea of a stage. This is not necessary however. The mat itself can become the stage.

In the storytelling curriculum I used in my own class, the children were first asked to go home and collect stories about themselves from their parents or caregivers.

As we began the project I sent home a letter telling the parents about the project and asking them to share stories with their children about the reasons why they were given their names. We called these their “naming stories”. The children then retold these stories to their peers in our kindergarten classroom. Then, after the children told their story, I scribed it for them, and the children dramatized it or 'story-acted' it with the help of the other students. Next, the children made a visual representation of the story (a drawing), and finally they wrote their story in words, with my assistance. We followed these stories with several other rounds of storytelling, making sure that all of the children had opportunities to tell stories and act them out.

How I Built on the Storytelling Curriculum

My initial research question for this study was: What does the story telling curriculum offer teachers and children? As described above, in order to generate data for this study, I engaged the students in my class in a storytelling curriculum for a period of eight weeks over the course of four months (two weeks in November, four weeks in January, two weeks in February). Following the work of Vivian Paley, my students told stories, acted them out, illustrated them, and then finally wrote them. However, unlike Vivian Paley, I also introduced the use of a video camera to our storytelling and story acting sessions. Initially, I added this aspect to the work so that I would be able to capture our work in process and replay it for the purposes of analysis. However, given that I had these videos and the children showed great interest in seeing themselves acting out their stories the children watched them too. We often took time to watch these story acting sessions together. As we viewed these moments, I found myself exploring yet

another research question: What does adding a video camera to the storytelling curriculum allow teachers and students to do?

In the following pages, I explore these questions and offer my own analysis in the hopes of inspiring other teachers and other teacher-researchers to engage with this approach to the kindergarten curriculum.

Potential Significance

This study is important for a number of reasons. First, examining the storytelling curriculum can offer insight into how teachers might support children's early literacy without resorting to direct instruction. While there may be some merits to limited amounts of direct instruction, there is little evidence that this form of literacy instruction is the most effective means to creating lifelong readers and writers (Burke, 2010; Cooper, Capo, Mathes & Gray, 2005; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Paley, 2004; Rubizzi & Bonilauri, 2012; Stooke, 2009). Indeed, there is much to suggest that current shifts in literacy education may work against our best efforts to support children in becoming adults who like to read and write. Data collected in Ontario over the last decade shows that while literacy scores may have risen during this swing towards direct instruction, children's pleasure in reading has declined (People for Education, 2011).

Second, examining the storytelling curriculum in close detail may offer insight into why the storytelling curriculum is effective in supporting children's early language and literacy skills. While some research on the storytelling curriculum (eg., Capo, Mathes, & Gray, 2007) suggests that participating in the storytelling curriculum can

produce gains in vocabulary and literacy skills, there is little research to suggest why this might be the case.

Third, Paley made ample use of the simple technology available to her (carbon paper). Since her first description of the storytelling curriculum, other forms of technology, such as digital video cameras, have become far more accessible and affordable in school contexts. Although some educators have used video cameras in their research of storytelling and story writing (Kim, 2012), few, if any, have analyzed what using a video camera can add to the storytelling curriculum process either for the teacher or for the children.

Fourth, examining the storytelling curriculum in close detail may also provide evidence for how teachers can meet their mandated curriculum expectations or outcomes in a way that is fun and engaging for both the children and themselves. Given the pressures to create readers and writers and the pressures to make sure all children are "at grade level", educators in the school system are in grave danger of losing their sense of fun about learning and passing this anxiety on to their students. The storytelling curriculum, which is so rooted in what children find interesting and important, which is so playful and so engaging, can be seen as a welcome means for meeting curriculum expectations and maintaining joy and inquiry in our classrooms.

This study feels particularly significant at this moment in time, as we witness the increasing attention that is being paid to the direct instruction of literacy skills in early years classrooms. As a teacher who has witnessed the shift in learning culture in my own province as kindergarten was brought into the school system in PEI, I can attest to the

increasing expectation that children will learn to read by the end of their kindergarten year. This expectation is talked about openly and is included in our Provincial Guidelines for Running/Reading Record Assessment for Kindergarten to Grade 6. While kindergarten was formerly seen as a time when children developed a wide range of language and literacy skills as well as social skills, physical skills, artistic and musical skills, teachers now seem to be accountable for meeting one expectation: that their students will read by the end of kindergarten. Teachers are given specific resources to expedite this end. These resources include guided readers, or levelled books and various other resources for teaching phonemic awareness or genres of writing and so on. Teachers often feel considerable pressure to ensure that all of their students are reading at the end of kindergarten, and in the face of this pressure they begin to adopt all of the latest commercial programs and products hoping to fulfil their responsibility in a timely fashion.

However, in my experience, I have seen that children generally need to use oral language to acquire vocabulary and a sense of narrative **before** they can understand the concept of writing or reading a story, and before they can understand **why anyone would want to write or read**. The storytelling curriculum may be a simple offering for building children's oral competency and understanding of story. However, some of its power may also be found in the way it inspires children to want to be part of a storytelling community.

Chapter II: Literature Review

An examination of recent research suggests the importance of a careful investigation of the storytelling curriculum in a kindergarten classroom. While there is relatively little published research on the storytelling curriculum, there is a great deal of research on play in early childhood classrooms (Bruner, 1983; Burke, 2010; Curtis & Carter, 2008; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Moyles, 2010; Paley, 2004) and on the impact of creating opportunities for oral language development before asking children to read or write print. As the storytelling curriculum provides a place for group play, and creates opportunities for oral language, reviewing this literature can provide more evidence for the need to study the storytelling curriculum. In this review, I first summarize some of the research on the storytelling curriculum, and I then examine current research on the role of play and oral language in young children's literacy learning.

The Storytelling Curriculum

There are a number of studies that explore Vivian Paley's storytelling curriculum (Binder, 2011; Cooper, 2005; Cooper, Capo, Mathes & Gray, 2007; Nicolopoulou, Barbosa de Sa, Ilgaz,& Brockmeyer, 2010) . While many of these studies have cast the storytelling curriculum in a positive light, few, if any, have specifically examined what the storytelling curriculum offers teacher and students in terms of assessment, creating a learning community, interest based learning, or how it might support emergent curriculum.

Patricia Cooper is a Paley scholar who has written extensively about the storytelling curriculum. In her paper entitled Literacy Learning and Pedagogical Purpose in Vivian Paley's "Storytelling Curriculum", Cooper (2005) offers a structural analysis

of the storytelling curriculum process, highlighting the potential for children's literacy learning. This study looks at the relationship between a balanced curriculum and the storytelling curriculum and suggests that storytelling supports a balanced literacy curriculum including" oral language, narrative form, conventions of print" (p.238), and so on .

In their study of the storytelling curriculum in two public prekindergarten and kindergarten and a mixed age classroom in low and mixed income communities in the south western United States, Cooper, Capo, Mathes, and Gray (2007) assessed the vocabulary and literacy skills of children who experienced a storytelling curriculum and children from similar backgrounds who did not. In comparing the vocabulary knowledge and literacy skills of the children, they found that the children who participated in the storytelling made significant gains in the area of vocabulary and literacy skills. Cooper et al. (2007) reports Paley's argument that, " the best preparation for academic success, from symbolic thinking to comprehension to problem solving, is the development of the imagination through play" (p.271). In this study, Cooper et a.l (2007) suggested four aspects of the storytelling curriculum as being accountable for its success. First, the union of experimentation and exploration of language based on children's interest and experiences increased children's motivation to become storytellers. Second, teachers could scaffold children's knowledge of print and of language. Third, the dramatization and dictation were inclusive in nature. Fourth, free choice of content increased participation in the storytelling activity.

It bears noting that during the initial storytelling, the teacher sat close to the students, making sure the paper they were using to write the stories on was clearly

visible. As the child told the story, the teacher echoed the storytellers' words to be sure what they were writing what was as intended. Teachers asked questions to clarify or extend the story. The stories that were collected were story-acted the same day. The study took place over the course of a school year. In the beginning of the year, teachers prompted the action by asking questions and taking suggestions from the audience for ways to act out a part. Over the course of the year students took more control over their own dramatizations.

In contrast, Wright, Bacigalupa, Black, and Burton (2007) explore the process of storytelling in their campus child development program including effective prompts to encourage creativity, and address "trouble spots" (p.363) such as aggression in stories. They argue that stories can strengthen home-school relationships and "improve communication between teachers, parents, and children" (p.369) . This article explores effective prompts and discusses procedures to enhance storytelling with young children.

Binder (2011) uses the storytelling curriculum as a base for researching professional practice in her article *Remembering Why: The Role of Story in Educational Research*. She identifies storytelling as a powerful research tool for exploring collaboration between colleagues and between teachers and students. She and her colleague believe that an arts-based curriculum can offer change in learning, experience, and process. She concludes that story "unites theory and practice in a visible partnership" (p.1). Thus storytelling and acting may support children's learning, teacher's intentional instruction, and known theories for teaching young children.

Taking a slightly different angle, Nicolopoulo, Barbosa de Sa, Ilgaz, and Brockmeyer (2010) argue that Vygotsky's (1962) analysis of play is supported by Paley's storytelling curriculum. They use an individual case study to illustrate the advantages of participating in the storytelling curriculum for children's language and social competence. In studying the opportunities for one young child's oral language, early literacy skills, narrative development and social competence, they conclude that children's participation in the storytelling activity promotes oral language skills, early literacy, and social competence as well as the interplay between story development and social skills (p.47).

In reviewing research on the storytelling curriculum, it bears noting that while the majority of these studies have painted the storytelling curriculum in a positive light, Nicolopoulou et al. (2010) have stated that a significant portion of Paley's work has been done with homogeneous middle class populations often in urban settings. In this way, they identify the possibility that due to the homogeneity of these populations, the generalizability of her work could be questioned.

Similarly, these researchers suggest that the analysis of "cognitive, narrative, and social competence skills" (p.47) in Paley's books and other writings may not be systematic enough to trace all of the skills engaged in the storytelling curriculum (Nicolopoulou, Barbosa de Sa, Ilgaz, & Brockmeyer, 2010).

In the following paragraphs I will present some studies that examine play and oral language. As Paley and Cooper suggest, these two elements contribute to children's success in literacy. A close examination of oral language and play support the value of conducting a study of the storytelling curriculum.

Examining the Role of Play and Oral Language

Play, learning and literacy development.

Research suggests that play in the kindergarten classroom can influence children's social, cognitive, emotional and physical skills. The work of scholars such as Bodrova and Leong (2007), Bruner (1983), Cooper (2009), Hewes (2006), and Moyles (2011) assert that the kinds of activities children engage in while at play can support their learning and development. For example, Bodrova and Leong (2007) in their study of activities that induce new mental processes and developmental accomplishments (p.98) found that play facilitates self regulation and children's ability to take another's perspective (p.114). Similarly, Moyles (2011) in her study of play found that children's "sensory, cognitive and linguistic growth develops through play" (p.3). Recently, Hewes (2006), Cooper (2009) and Moyles (2011), have posited that the current emphasis on academic skills in schools threatens children's play, and hence the scope of learning available to young children.

Some researchers have found the storytelling curriculum may effectively support learning in the area of early literacy while encouraging play-like activity that has the added benefit of offering social, emotional growth (Nicolopoulou et al, 2010). Multimodal learning is a key component of learning in the early years (Kendrick, 2014; Wohlwend, 2008). It is important to explore a curriculum that can offer opportunities for multimodal expression to young children.

I will go on to discuss, oral language, play, literacy and storytelling in more depth in the following sections.

Oral language

As Amaro and Moreia (2001) observe, "Language is a child's passport to her culture" **(**p.8). As argued by Cooper (2011), oral language as an embodiment of culture is the cornerstone of all literacy. This learning begins at home where parents share oral stories and children are exposed to "sophisticated talk" (Craig, Curenton, & Flanigan, 2008, p.183). Children are expected to use language to communicate in the world and to become contributors in our society. These language skills "are an essential element of young children's development" (Carter, Chard, & Pool, 2009, p.510) and allow them to engage with others in meaningful ways, to gather, and understand knowledge in many areas. Important relationships develop when children talk to each other. Children begin to discover that what they say must be understood by another, and through this they begin to construct "forms and meaning of language" as Malaguzzi states in a conversation with Rankin (Rankin, 2004, p.84). Malaguzzi further explains that social and cognitive development are simultaneous, reiterating that the relationships are important because "children's development benefits from interaction" (p.83). Rankin himself identifies that, "talking to another allows children to be in continual reconstruction of their identity" (Rankin, 2004, p.83). Paley (1981) too, identifies play through storytelling [oral language] as a powerful influence on children's development.

We can propose that oral language, used in the context of an interactive conversation or story sharing, benefits children and augments their development. It encourages their construction of their own identity and their understanding of their world and culture through interactions with peers or adults.

Children naturally engage in using oral language when they interact during playtime. An opportunity for play-like activity occurs when they are story acting. This activity allows oral language practice to be a part of children's development (Paley,2004: Cooper, 2011). Consequently, when children create the play story, they devise ways to represent their narrative which helps them to "organize their inner thoughts" (Kendrick, 2005). Finally, when children integrate speaking and gesture, they can begin to understand the workings of language and literacy (Edwards & Wills, 2000). From an educator's perspective, to use oral language meaningfully, children need to have opportunities to practice it, therefore it is the responsibility of the educator to provide invitations for its use through collaborative activities such as play.

Play and oral language.

Play is central to oral language and social development (Burke, 2010; Cooper, 2005; Roskos,Tabors, & Lenhart, 2009). Children interact with each other and learn to make themselves understood. Play offers opportunities for children to practice language and extend their experience with oral literacy. According to New (2003), children require a variety of supports for early literacy including "meaningful literacy events" (p.257). Language is scaffolded by setting up opportunities for conversation and participation (Roskos, Patton, & Lenhart, 2009). Teachers can plan for these opportunities by providing time for play and play like activities. When children engage in pretend play it translates into a "beginning of narrative skills" (Amaro & Moirera, 2001, p.9). As they play, the story begins to unfold. For instance one child might exclaim," I'm a cowboy!" and immediately the scene begins to be set for the play to evolve. Interaction of play and language allows children to prepare for the world they

will live in, to participate in a pleasurable experience, and to improve their intellect (Bruner,1983; Paley, 1981). Bruner further explains that " Children need play that they control as it provides an opportunity for them to be courageous in thinking, talking and becoming him/herself " (p.69), supporting the notion that play is pivotal in supporting both social development and oral language.

The connection between play and language is profound. When children participate in "knowledge-building" (Wells, 2004, p.111) activity, they are constructing an understanding of what they know and what they say. This results in a change in their "collective understanding" (p.111). In other words speaking and listening to each other can alter individual and group understanding about what they know. For children, play is a vehicle for language use and essential to their development. It contributes to language practice and the development of narrative and inter-relational skills. In studying the importance of play, Whitebread and Jameson (2011) assert that play is "vital" in empowering children to be creative, confident learners. These researchers encourage teachers/educators to incorporate opportunities for "structured imaginative play" (p.105) into their curriculum planning. Thus, Paley's (1990) storytelling and story acting may enhance oral language and narrative development in young children.

Child-centered play.

Educators of young children know that the curriculum inspires motivation, and curiosity if it grows from children’s interests.(Burke, 2010; Carter & Curtis, 2008; Cooper, Curtis, Mathes, & Gray, 2007; Moyles,2005). Play that is child-centered is meaningful and purposeful to children, and they are engaged because it has come from

within. Teachers and educators who listen and observe children can scaffold their learning by providing invitations based on their observations of children's interests during play (Burke, 2010; Carter & Curtis, 2008; Stacey, 2009). Play is child-centered (Burke, 2010; Paley, 2004), allowing children to practice social skills, construct knowledge, and try out new ideas. Teachers who listen carefully can extend children's learning, making it meaningful and engaging for them by basing it on the children's interests. This approach allows children to feel involved in their own learning (Amaro & Moreira ,2001).

Play and literacy.

Burke (2010) explains that the background of dramatic play is where children can experiment with language: "Early literacy requires a background - dramatic role-play can help provide it" (p.51). Once children have experienced a scenario of their making in dramatic play and explored language and relationships, they are more prepared to write or draw or speak about it as it is immediate and lived experience. This contributes to their desire to document the experience in drawing or writing. Early literacy is built on the foundation of oral language that expands to include writing and reading (Burke, 2010; Christie, 1990; Dyson, 2003; Hewes, 2008; Whitebread, & Jameson, 2010). A curriculum that can provide experiences through play contributes to children's a strong foundation in oral language and literacy (drawing, reading and writing).

Research conducted in the late eighties and early nineties strongly supports the play/ literacy connection. According to Christie (1991), children require a variety of

"knowledge sources" (p.7) to analyze situations and to problem solve. He goes on to say that within the context of play, early literacy can be demonstrated and investigated and that "literacy enriches play", and that it is a "fundamental cognitive activity in preparation for more complex cognitive activity such as literacy" (p.8). From a more recent perspective, Jane Hewes (2008) concurs that play fosters turn taking, negotiation, conversation, problem solving, and cooperation. The kind of representational thinking children need for pretend play is the same needed for literacy activities (Hewes, 2008). Oral language used in this context becomes the "raw material" for early writing (Dyson, 2003). Before children use writing to express themselves they need experiences with language to build the foundations for further literacy.

One component of the storytelling approach is dramatic role play; this provides the lived experience upon which early literacy builds. The dramatizations of the storytelling curriculum "mimic play" (Bacigalupa, Black, Burton,& Wright, 2008, p.362). These dramatizations can shed light on how children think and how they see the world. Storytelling may also provide for children's social and emotional needs and allow for a curriculum that is responsive to their interests (Bacigalupa, Black, Burton, & Wright, 2008; Cooper,1993; Paley,1990). The story dictation can provide an introduction to the process and purpose of writing and creative expression (Cooper,1993).

Storytelling and writing.

The storytelling curriculum requires the teacher to scribe or take the child's dictation of their story. When these stories are written down by more proficient writers

and shared with others, children feel acknowledged and valued (Giles & Tunks 2009). Children can begin to see the connection between their speech and the written word, thus creating an awareness of the purpose of writing. Through the dictation process children may be introduced to conventions of print and begin to understand that getting their thoughts into writing allows them to communicate with others (Cooper, Curtis, Mathes, & Gray, 2007; Giles & Tunks 2009; Strickland & Morrow, 1989). Sylvia Ashton-Warner supported her students learning with "organic language" when she let them write stories that had "sprung from the circumstances of their own lives" (Warner,1963,p.60) In this way she was a precursor to this notion of using children's own words to scaffold their reading and writing. The story telling curriculum, too, offers a context for learning language in a social milieu through children's engagement with each other and language. Constructing language is a happy result of this interaction. Opportunities for adults to observe, assess, and scaffold children's learning are embedded as children acquire language through active participation in the storytelling curriculum, "giving children the opportunity to tell stories helps their language development by enhancing vocabulary, syntactic complexity, sense of story structure and comprehension (Strickland & Morrow 1989, p.261).

A child-centred emergent curriculum.

Emergent curriculum is child-initiated and responds to children's interests (Jones & Reynolds, 2011;Wein, 2008). The teacher becomes the facilitator, listening and observing to bring children the opportunity to discover more, dig deeper and construct further knowledge. Stacey (2009) suggests that "When teachers are keen observers, when they notice not only what children are doing and playing at, but also *how* they are

playing and what they are saying as they play, they are in a strong position to develop curriculum based on their observations" (p. 5-6). The philosophy of emergent curriculum is built on recognized theorists, including Dewey, Vygotsky, and Piaget (Stacey, 2009). The theories of Freire (1993) and of Malaguzzi (1993) support the idea of teacher and student as learners, who learn to work collaboratively as they learn together. Children's ideas are valued and adults advance their interests by providing thoughtful invitations (Edwards, Gandidni, & Forman, 1998; Katz, & Chard, 2000; Wien, 2008). Teachers who invested in emergent teaching found they "developed more breadth and depth to their images of children" Haigh (2007. p.64). Paley, too, develops an understanding of children's thinking through "conversations, stories and playacting" affording a deeper perception of her students.

Emergent curriculum is influenced by the Reggio Approach and embraces multimodal concepts (Binder, 2014). The approach to literacy from this framework advocates a focus on sociocultural aspects of children's learning, with a focus on what knowledge and experience children bring to school rather than a reliance on developmental stages and expectations. Binder suggests we refer to children's literacy learning as "early literacy" in this context. Recent trends in school literacy focus on literacy learning that is "print driven and school based", which is referred to as "emergent literacy" (Binder,2014). The emergent curriculum offers teachers and children opportunities for building relationships with each other and with early literacy (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012). Learning paths are revealed when the teachers and children reflect on past experiences together. Teachers document the learning to make it visible. This kind of documentation is not easily interchanged with a more

limited measurement of learning in a standardized way because it represents traces of learning (Fyfe, 2012). This offers a reflection of the whole child as an individual rather than a standardized picture of the child.

Connected to the idea of child-centered learning is the idea of holistic education. This practice engages the whole child; physical, cognitive, spiritual, social, emotional and aesthetic (Hare, 2010). It focuses on the" interconnectedness" of all things. (Miller, 2003) and is a contrast to the "static and fragmented" school system that focuses standards and testing (Miller, 2003).

Skills-based learning.

We can contrast a skills-based approach, or as Roskos and Christie (2011) call it "explicit language and literacy instruction", to the more emergent notion of literacy learning within a play context (p. 74). In a recent conversation with Clara Jean Howard, this literacy and language coach visiting PEI recounted that the skills-based approach is producing "great decoders but not comprehenders" (C.J. Howard, personal communication, August, 2013). This observation is supported by research in other regions that has found explicit literacy instruction does not translate into strong comprehension skills (Krashen, 2009). A "skills-based approach" purports to develop strong literacy skills through strong evidence based teaching strategies (National Strategy for Early Learners, 2009). In this approach, the skills for teaching literacy are "associated with accurate reading and writing including phonics, spelling, writing, spoken expression, comprehension and fluency" (p.32). The idea that literacy is multifaceted, and that teaching just these skills misses the holistic sense of language that

children's narratives can provide, is not addressed. Rather, as Spencer (2009) reports, there is an "emphasis on instructional approaches [that are] grounded in scientifically based research outcomes". He examines this idea that these research based outcomes perpetuate " the belief that 'science' could somehow prevent or rectify reading problems" (p.220). Educators must question whether these kinds of programs are best practice for teaching young children, acknowledging their interests, and allowing them to participate in their own learning.

Summary

The focus of this literature review was to examine current research on the role of play and oral language in young children's literacy learning, and then review the research on the storytelling curriculum.

Researchers suggest that storytelling supports play-like activity, oral language use, and narrative practice. However, there are a few gaps in the current literature. For example, few studies have systematically analyzed what teachers and students gain from participating in a storytelling curriculum. In addition, few, if any studies have examined what happens when a video camera is added to the storytelling curriculum protocol. I am adding to existant the studies in one way by addressing the concerns of Nicolopoulou et al. regarding populations in urban settings by conducting a study in a rural environment. Similarly, few, if any studies have examined how the storytelling curriculum could support a mandated provincial curricula. Therefore, to address these gaps, this study will incorporate a more systematic approach to analyzing the storytelling curriculum, and will utilize a video camera as part of the process.

Chapter III: Theoretical Framework

Action Research Approach

Action Research has provided the theoretical framework for my work. The Action Research process is a familiar one for educators even if they do not name it as such, as we are constantly engaging in a process of planning, acting, and reviewing the effect of our actions on our teaching to ascertain their value and impact (McNiff, 2002; Stringer, 2014). Action Research as a research method is well suited to classroom research for the reasons just mentioned. It is a practical method that enhances and clarifies the intention of the researcher by requiring constant reflection on changes in the classroom.

I chose this approach because it fit seamlessly into my classroom routine and environment. As I try to put emergent curriculum into practice an in my classroom I found that the process of action research closely reflected the "cycle of inquiry" so often discussed in early childhood education (Stacey, 2007). This process includes observing, questioning, responding with action and reflecting on the action to begin the process all over again. The storytelling project fits this method as it requires action and reflection and reaction. For me the spiral of listening, observing, reflecting and acting is refined by an action research approach.

Before I began this research study, the spiral of observing, thinking, and acting was already in place in my kindergarten classroom and I was already interested in improving my practice. In this way, action research emerged as an appropriate method for this research, as it follows the same cycle of observing and reflecting, and its intent is

to improve practice (Miller, 2011). As argued by Kemmis (2009), through action research practitioners can gain "understanding of their practice and the conditions in which they practice" (p. 463) thus having an impact on practice and learning. Action research is practical. It may be conducted on one's own practice and involves one's own thinking and reflecting on one's work (McNiff, 2002). This means it can be done in the workplace, expanding on what usually happens in a classroom. Hansen (2011) affirms that using action research can provide an "in depth systematic approach to problem solving"(p. 82). In the process of conducting an in-depth study, new learning is revealed, and, as Saul (2010) suggests, this learning becomes transformative for the researcher. Transformation then inspires the possibility for further investigation. Findings from this kind of research can benefit other practitioners when results are shared among colleagues. This kind of sharing may incite new investigations in other classrooms. So, action research is like a rhizome, once begun it can send tendrils out to become investigations in other classrooms and in the practitioner's own classroom. Although the findings of action research cannot be generalised, they can be used to inform the work in other classrooms, to be "tried and adapted in a new context" (Evans, Lomax & Morgan, 2000, p. 407).

The process of action research lends itself to narrative as there is a beginning, a middle, and an end. (Niemi, Hannu, & Kannas 2010). For me, the story is inspired by the revelations, findings, and inspirations of the project. In the telling, I must find my voice and a form to convey findings.

The next step after deciding on this research method was to formalize the action with data collection, analysis and writing about the project. To provide a little

background about the culture of research at our school, I can relate that our school is invested in having teachers become better at teaching literacy so that students will have success in learning, writing and reading. In particular, the teachers and administrators have been involved in ongoing action to improve the teaching of writing. Over the course of two years we have been collecting and analyzing data school-wide to improve student success. The most recent spiral of investigation identified Kindergarten Procedural writing as an area that needed attention. We taught the idea of telling someone how to do something using the words 'first, then, finally', then we devised a prompt for the children to illustrate and write. The prompt was challenging for the children; it produced what was considered to be an acceptable product, but I noted that the children seemed to lack enthusiasm during the process. Interestingly, when we analyzed our data, the children showed a marked improvement in the area of procedural writing, but a fall in the area of personal narrative. This shift suggested to me that we needed to focus on personal narratives. The storytelling curriculum seemed a good fit for this focus, as it is built on the development of personal narratives.

Young children are generally natural storytellers. The personal narrative genre is their milieu. They learn to tell stories by recounting their lived experience (Stadler & Gay, 2005). When asking them to draw or write, they will usually choose something from their experience to tell about. Listening to children allows me to understand how the child is constructing meaning about his/her world and his/her place in it. These stories are a means of self expression, communication, and "meaning making of their lived experience" (Ahn & Filipenko, p.280). I was taken with the idea of promoting this natural inclination with the storytelling curriculum to further children’s learning in early literacy, specifically oral language, narrative, sequence and eventually concepts of print,

writing and reading. The idea of acting their story out with other children offers an effective motivation for dictating, drawing, and writing (Nicolopoulou et al., 2010). I was ready to explore children's narrative, validating their stories by listening, retelling and acting them out through this action research project. The story acting offers the element of play, an integral part of any early childhood classroom.

Play becomes an important motivator for early literacy. This study is based on the concept that young children should have a solid grounding in how to use language orally before being asked to write or read (Cooper, Capo, Mathes, & Gray 2007; Stadler & Ward, 2005). Without this foundational understanding of how to first voice an idea or build a narrative, the concept of letters, words, writing and reading are not relevant to children.

Action research was suited to the mandate of our school development plan as well as my own research goals. Indeed, this work on early literacy for kindergarten students is part of the larger picture of professional development at our school. In this frame, I see an opportunity for dialogue about oral language and its importance in the early years, how to incorporate opportunities for its use, and the value of play as a starting place for that oral language in my kindergarten classroom.

Children's initial encounters with language are oral and to scaffold their learning socio-cultural theories of learning suggest that we begin with what they know and teach to their "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1962) gradually leading them to new skills, in this case moving from oral language practice, to story acting, to drawing and finally to written stories using their personal narrative as the incentive. In addition to meeting my own literacy goals for my kindergarten children, this action research

project could meet the school's goals for intentional teaching in the area of literacy by using a storytelling curriculum that encourages oral language and narrative.

I posed several research questions to investigate these ideas: What does the storytelling curriculum offer the teachers ? What does the storytelling curriculum offer children? What does adding a video camera offer teachers and students? These questions evolved from initial broad questions about the impact of storytelling on children's oral language to more specific questions that suited the research and the storytelling curriculum. This change was based on my experience with the children, as well as noting their responses to the storytelling, the story acting and the videos of themselves. My interest in preserving play as a vehicle for oral language in kindergarten classrooms through an emergent curriculum motivated this study as well as my love of a good story and the influence of Reggio Narra.

In summary, I have described who I am as a researcher, and why I was drawn to explore the storytelling curriculum as a research project. I have also examined action research as a method for approaching this study. Action research involves inquiry and observation. It requires identifying a problem, devising a solution, trying out the solution, collecting and analyzing data and finally reflecting on the success of the intervention/solution. The final step is changing teaching practice to accommodate the new information. The purpose of conducting an educational action research study is to improve teaching which is my professional goal.

In this study a progression of storytelling requests allowed both students and the teacher (myself) to discover ways in which documentation and reflection could advance

our learning. For example, I asked the students to bring in the story of how they got their names to begin our storytelling adventure. The next storytelling request was for a family story (travel or event) and finally an everyday story about something that happened in their everyday life. I recorded each of these stories on paper as the child told them to me. Finally we dramatized the stories. I used the video camera to record the dramatizations.

The action research process is a spiral of action, reflection, and re-action. Based on the action of telling the naming stories and videoing them the children learned about story acting with the camera. The next phase was story acting the family story. After selecting the parts, we acted the story. We discovered it was important to read the story first to establish what would be expected of the actors. This improved the action for this round of stories. Another discovery occurred when we began the everyday stories. The children and I discovered that hearing the story first was important and this time, that brainstorming a list of animate and inanimate objects needed for the story acting helped us act it out without stopping to add in an essential part.

The rigour of the action research process was an organic element in the unfolding of this research project. Keeping the researcher's log and the field notes was a part of the process that contributed to my reflections, discoveries and conclusions. The video recording of the data was crucial to the process as well. Using the video camera was my intention from the beginning but only as another way to collect data. I knew the action would be ephemeral and that I could not adequately document it with paper and pencil as I would be director and producer of the stories and far too involved to make on-the-

spot observations. The camera allowed me to review the action. It was from reviewing the stories on the videos that new learning evolved.

In the pages that follow, I will describe in detail how I conducted this research project in my kindergarten classroom. I will also introduce you to the children from my kindergarten class and what they taught me about the storytelling curriculum during one academic year when I dedicated myself to listening deeply to our work together.

Chapter IV: Methods

In this chapter, I describe the participants in this project and how I generated and analyzed my data. In the following chapters, I offer an analysis of the data and illustrate some of the things the storytelling curriculum can offer teachers and children and what adding a video camera to the storytelling curriculum allows teachers and students to do. I conclude with a discussion of my analysis and the implications this analysis holds for educators, administrators, teacher educators and policy writers in ministries of education.

The Research Site

This site for this project was the classroom where I teach in a small rural school on Prince Edward Island. I recieved ethics approval to conduct this research project from the Research Ethics Boards of both my university and my School Board. The participants in this project were the eleven students in my kindergarten class. The class consisted of six boys and five girls. All of the children in my class were invited to participate in this storytelling project by virtue of being in my class, and all of the parents of the children accepted this invitation. Parents of these students were contacted by a letter of invitation (see Appendix A) and were informed that all participation was voluntary. If a child or parent chose not to participate, they were still invited to participate in the storytelling project, although their stories would not be collected as data. Any non-participating students would continue with regular, routine instruction as per the Social Studies and Literacy Curricula (Kindergarten Integrated Curriculum 2008).

I explained the research project at the "Meet The Teacher Night" held at the school early in the fall, 2012. Parents were able to ask questions, and see examples of the kind of stories for which I asked. The information letter (see Appendix B) was thoroughly explained at that time and the parents or guardians were asked to sign an informed consent form for their child to participate (See Appendix B). Included in the consent form was permission for me to share the children's stories anonymously with other parents in the class at a Celebration of Family Stories Night, as well as with teachers (especially grade one to three teachers) at Garden Elementary School (a pseudonym). Permission was requested from the families to share photos and artefacts as well as the stories. I informed the parents that I would make copies of their own child's story transcript for parents (if they wished to keep this).

The Environment

The classroom is a standard size classroom for a public school. It is set up with centers: Blocks - this center, in the left hand corner of the room, shelves with a variety of building materials. A toy box with vehicles and people extends play. To the right of the blocks is the dress-up center. A small rolling "closet" holds clothing and shoes, as well as shelving for jewellery, goggles, baby clothes etc. Turning the corner to the right is the listening center, and then a storage cupboard There is the computer center, and a math center. Around the corner at the end of the room there are shelves for the storage of books and games. Along the end of the room there is an arts and crafts center and storage and beyond that, the sink. Then you are at the door, where you can see the mat under the suspended sheer fabric. The fabric softens the room and creates a 'stage' for the stories when we act them out. The physical environment is designed to offer varied

experiences for the children to develop autonomy. This setting supports a play-based learning and gives the children agency for their own learning.

Field notes Dec. 6, 2012

Figure 2. Photo of classroom

Participants

This study was conducted in my own classroom where I knew the children, and they knew me. I believe this situation created a safe environment for the students. I became a teacher researcher for the duration of this project. I would like to introduce you to the participants, the eleven children in my kindergarten class. Here is a brief description of each child. The names have been changed to provide anonymity for these students. These were the enthusiastic, ebullient, children in my kindergarten class.

Table 1

Description of the children in my classroom who participated in this research project.

Name	Age	Description
Janie	Age 6	Tall, brown eyes, brown hair, glasses, enthusiastic , creative, full of love. Enjoys dramatic play and makes detailed inventive drawings. Loves pink and cats.
Jackie	Age 5	Dark straight hair, dark eyes, slender, gentle, good friend to all, peace maker, playful. enjoys dramatic play and telling us about her sister.
Jack	Age 5	Tall, blond and blue eyed. Intense, leader, creative, full of energy, enjoys building and blocks and outdoor play and playing transformers.
Corey	Age 5	Big expressive brown eyes, light brown hair, sensitive, gentle nature, roll with the action, follower, enjoys outdoor play, tractors and transformers.
Adam	Age 5	Small build, dark hair and big brown eyes, thinker and talker, able to see a problem. Enjoys nature walks, reading, and his dinosaur video game.
Mari	Age 5	Small, long medium brown hair, dramatic and practical, confident, generally happy. loves dramatic play and Canada Day, wants to be an actress.
Ollie	Age 5	Tall dark haired and brown eyes, quiet but fun loving, interested in how things work, and building things and interested in big machines.
Nat	Age 5	Small, blond, blue eyes. Independent, enjoys Star Wars, his friends, playing outside. Creative thinker.
Lola	Age 5	Petite, blond curly hair, blue eyes, heart shaped face, independent, active, went to Disney world with her family, enjoys dramatic and rough and tumble play.

Gailyn	Age 5	Blue eyes, medium brown hair, slender very quiet , and shy. Loves the color purple, very creative, makes detailed drawings.
Noah	Age 5	Tall, slender, wavy medium brown hair, blue eyes, glasses, quiet, sensitive. Loves Angry Birds game, enjoys playing in building and blocks with cars, and outside transformer game, hockey, and his dog.

Data Collection Methods

I used participant observation, video recording, written field notes and photography to collect data for this research project. I began the study by asking the children to go home and ask their parents about their naming (for instance: why that name?, what meaning did it have for parents?, meaning of the name itself?). These everyday stories were collected from the children in the manner recommended by Paley (Cooper, Capo, Mathes, & Gray, 2007; Paley, 1981). Eventually, after the story was told orally and dramatized, the children were given the opportunity to write their stories. Initially, the children's stories were scribed by the teacher.

Participant observation.

Formal and informal participant observations were conducted throughout the period of data generation. I observed the children during storytelling and as they interacted with each other during the story acting, noting both their verbal and non verbal languages. I observed how they solved problems, developed socially, and collaborated. Participant observation was an invaluable tool for learning how the

children were engaging with the storytelling curriculum and for helping me answer the research questions.

Video recording and transcripts.

Another data collection method was the video recording of the children's storytelling and story acting. In all there were thirty-one videos recorded during data collection. The videos were short, no longer than five minutes. The videos included the children story acting their naming stories, their everyday stories and a story based on a photo from home. Children were requested to bring "naming stories" but not all of them brought one. The same is true for the "everyday stories" and the "photo from home stories". One naming story was not recorded on video as the child was too shy in front of the camera to tell his story that way. His story was written by his mother and remains in the artefacts. This child was able to tell me bits of his naming story but only with deliberate prompts from me. Three photo inspired stories were not recorded on video but were transcribed as they were acted out, as the camera was not available for these impromptu dramatizations. These were recorded by hand, capturing the dialogue with gestures noted to keep the feel of the drama as close to the actual action as possible. These were then transcribed onto the computer.

After recording these events, I transcribed the photo from home stories, the naming stories, the everyday stories and their dramatizations. The resulting transcripts represented the actual dialogue of the children and the researcher, and the story acting of the children. This method of data generation brought vitality to the data and insight for

the researcher. The transcriptions of the videos were completed using Transana, a tool for transcribing. These transcriptions allowed me to revisit and to reflect on the process.

Photographs.

The photos used in the data collection were those the children brought from home as the impetus for a story. The photos were used to tell the story and then collected to make a bulletin board display. I photographed these photos on the display to keep as artefacts. The photos were placed next to the children's own interpretation of the story in drawing and writing on the bulletin board. I have used some still frames from the videos to illustrate the stories in this thesis. I did collect some still photos of the children telling stories as a back up to the video and sometimes used these instead of the video for those children who were shy in front of the camera.

Field notes.

My own reflections, thoughts and observations were collected in a field journal. Field notes were kept as a resource for the daily what, where, when, how, why. They gave a detailed description of the environment, who was present, what was happening at the time. These aided in giving vitality to the data and over lapped with my researcher's log in many instances.

Researcher's log.

Often entries were made in the researcher's log during the transcription process. The researcher's log was used as a place for my reflections. It held what went well,

evolutions or changes, eureka moments and developing thoughts about implications and recommendations.

Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, I began by reviewing the video recordings of the stories and dramatizations, and transcribing them. These transcripts were then contrasted and compared with the anecdotal field notes and observations made during and after the scribing and the dramatizations. This study was approached inductively beginning with the data, to explore what was revealed in the story gathering and subsequently in the story acting. The story acting or dramatizations were gathered on a small Flip video camera, then transferred to my computer and storage device. At home, I could watch the stories we had engaged in during the day and transcribe the dialogue and the action. The action was crucial to the data; it illustrated many of the findings in this study. The transcriptions described the action which allowed me to investigate how it could contribute to play-like activity in my classroom, and explore its value for oral language use and development with young children. With the research questions in mind, reading the transcripts and reviewing the videos allowed me to explore some of what the storytelling curriculum offered to me as an educator and to the children as participants.

The transcription process was lengthy, requiring me to view and review the videos multiple times. I found the way it worked best, was to watch short snippets of the videos and transcribe the dialogue, then review and transcribe to capture the action. The action transcriptions demanded many viewings and interpretations of action and

interaction connected to the dialogue. It was an intricate weaving and recounting into words of what was an ephemeral real life story acting event. In the viewing and reviewing much was revealed that was not absorbed in the short moments in which the scenes it unfolded in the classroom. The possibilities for close analysis during these viewings and reviewings were plentiful. They provided the rich and dense data which form the basis for my findings and conclusions. Some of the transcriptions, for example the first naming stories, were only half a page or less. As we began to dramatize the everyday stories the transcriptions became longer, often resulting in two to three pages of text, making a total of forty pages of transcriptions which integrated the dialogue and the actions heard and seen in the videos of the section. After transcribing all of these video stories, I then analyzed these pages of dialogue and video transcriptions of the children for themes or threads that comprised the rich and dense woven mat of findings.

Data debriefing sessions.

The data analysis process was enhanced by conversations with my thesis committee. These conversations/discussions caused me to reflect on the research questions and allowed new understandings to be revealed. These discoveries inspired new thinking about the original research question, and identified the value of changing to a narrower focus regarding what the storytelling curriculum offers the teacher and students and what it could allow teachers and students to do.

Trustworthiness Features

Bryman, Teevan and Bell (2009) in their book, *Social Research Methods*, address the question of reliability and validity of qualitative research. They speak to the

four components of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Below I will address these areas in relation to my own action research.

I believe that the collection of rich, descriptive, authentic data for this project can satisfy trustworthiness criteria. The study design required field notes and transcriptions which qualify as "thick description" (Geertz,1973 as cited in Bell, Bryman, Teevan, 2009. p. 133) which are an abundant and detailed chronicle of the group and their activities. This data was coded and analyzed. This chronicle offers opportunity for others to consider whether the findings could be meaningful in other venues.

Dependability is a factor which was addressed by keeping chronological records of observations, field notes, recordings, and transcripts. These features were accessible on my devices. In this way, all phases of the project were documented. These complete records can be accessed by interested parties as needed.

Confirmability can be defined as a neutral stance where the findings of a study are formed by the participants, not by the researcher and her possible motivation, interest or bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This project was entered into with an open mind and a sense of adventure for what might evolve. I was open to the possibility that observations and documentation could lead to unexpected revelations. Credibility was addressed throughout the process. I continually checked back and shared with the children what I was learning. Through the course of this project I had many opportunities to review the video data, field notes, researcher's log and children's work, all of which shaped the evolution of the study. My position was neutral in as much as I could be. My philosophy

of education is a holistic one where children are encouraged to share their own experiences and where the teacher would address the whole child in an environment where the learning is child-centred and play-based.

Limitations of the study

The findings of this study were limited by several factors. I conducted this study in my own kindergarten classroom in a rural setting resulting in a small sample of children all of whom live in the local community. The study's findings represented responses from this homogenous group from similar socio-economic backgrounds. Consideration of the experiences of children from an urban area could further extend our understanding of the potential use of the storytelling curriculum as an approach to literacy learning. .

In addition, the students who participated in the storytelling sessions in my class all had English as their first language. Including students who have English as an Additional Language in further studies could illuminate the impact of storytelling on children with varying literacy experiences.

Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed my research approach, and how I collected and analyzed my data. To help the reader understand this process I reviewed the research questions, described the research site, introduced the participants and defined my role as the researcher. I then discussed data collection and analysis. In addition, I outlined the trustworthiness features of this project. In the next chapters, I provide descriptions of the children enacting their stories and I begin to discuss some of the things the storytelling curriculum offered me as an educator and the children as participants. I have woven

examples from the field and my analysis into these chapters. In Chapters V,VI, and VII, I discuss the children's everyday stories and offer the specific findings from this research project. In Chapter VIII, Video Recording is addressed. The Discussion in Chapter IX focuses on what the storytelling curriculum allows the children and the teacher to do, and concludes with the implications of these findings for teacher educators, administrators and policy writers.

Chapter V: Everyday Stories and Assessment

In analyzing the data, I found that the storytelling curriculum had much to offer. However, one of the most significant findings was that the storytelling curriculum allowed me, as a teacher, multiple opportunities to assess the children in unobtrusive and authentic ways. This was particularly the case during story acting sessions. In this chapter, I describe a few story acting sessions and discuss some of the things I was able to assess through engaging the children in this process.

Noah's Everyday Story: Angry Birds Star Wars

Figure 2. Directing Angry Bird Star Wars.

It is an early winter afternoon and the children are preparing to act out Noah's story of Angry Birds.

"All right, here we go," I say, watching as the children begin to settle into their places.

Noah sits at the edge of the mat in front of the camera, his friend Nat who is "the phone" sits next to him, and another child plays Noah's Dad on the other side of him. The rest of the children are off the mat waiting to join in the story.

"It's Angry Bird Star Wars" interjects Nat, plainly excited that his friends are about to bring this story to life. The children giggle.

" Are we ready to listen and see how it unfolds?" I ask, enjoying their excitement about this new story. After a few seconds' pause I begin reading Noah's story to the class from the lines I scribed for him earlier today.

"I played angry birds on my dad's cell phone," I read.

"It's Angry Bird Star Wars," Nat reminds us again.

Noah pushes buttons on Nat, "the phone", as I read "You had to try to knock down space pigs."

Noah says "All the pigs galore" and gestures for all the friends who are pigs to come onto the mat. Some of the children begin to fall this way and that, others line up along the far edge of the mat. Before I can read any further some of the children begin to protest that some of them need to be birds and that they can't all be pigs.

When they have resolved this problem I continue, " I was pulling the birds. They can go under stuff or they can go over stuff and get pigs" The children scramble on the floor showing how they can go under things. Some of them are rolling on their backs with their legs pulled up others are standing and bending at the waist. They make lots of silly noises pretending to be space pigs. Jackie and Janie are the birds getting the pig touching them so they fall down.

"I got ten pigs in a row" I continue reading Noah's story . "I got on a different game. On that one I had to get black birds— they turn red which means they turn

angry". Some of the children begin to make mad faces and ball their hands into fists which they then punch in the air or hold stiffly at their sides.

"Let's see your angry birds" I say, watching as they find their angriest grimaces. "When they are red, you click on them and they blow up" I read. "Let's see you blowing up", I say, and instantly the kids begin making lots of 'foofing', "blow up" noises as they jump up and fall down or kick their legs up behind them. But not Jackie. Jackie is standing in the middle of "the birds", looking around, unsure what to do. "Blow up Jackie. That's the end of you" I say but it does not seem to help.

Just then, Corey puts his hand on her shoulder and offering expert advice, says to Jackie "That means you pop and you lay down and you're out of pieces" – spreading his hands wide to illustrate "out of pieces." "And then you break up", he encourages her.

"Did you hear that?" I ask her, and Jackie nods. "You better click some more" I say to Noah, encouraging him to "click" so Jackie will know when to "blow up" like her friends.

"Then I gave the phone back to my dad" I say as Noah gives the 'phone' to his 'dad' and the children run off the mat.

(Transcription of story acted January 8, 2013)

Looking at this story that Noah told, and how his friends acted it out gave me significant data to assess the children's knowledge of their everyday world, their communication skills and their vocabularies. For example, as I watched this scene unfold, I noticed that Jackie did not know how to 'blow up'. She stood and watched her friends but really did not know what to do when it was time to "blow up". Luckily, her

friend Corey saw her discomfort and gave her a suggestion. He used vivid language to explain what she needed to do, “That means you pop and you lay down and you're out of pieces” – spreading his hands wide to illustrate “out of pieces”. "And then you break up" he said. Corey clearly had an idea of what exploding should look like which he communicated to Jackie in graphic language and gestures, which in turn, helped her to act her part. This kind of story acting allowed me to assess on many levels what the children could and could not do when faced with the need to communicate a new idea.

What also struck me was that Corey noticed Jackie had not a clue what to do and helped her out. None of the other children seemed to notice. This moment gave me a lovely insight into Corey's personality. I could see him as a thoughtful, caring helper, something I may not have seen without this activity and the video recording. It also allowed me to see that Corey was able to read Jackie’s lack of participation accurately. He did not think she was being shy, or that she did not want to participate. He understood that she didn’t understand. In reviewing the video of the playacting and reading the transcript I was able to see some of what Corey understood about the Angry Birds game and get a glimpse of his experience with it. I could see in an interaction with his peers that he was tuned into what was happening around him and picking up on social cues, not only to act his part, but to be a helper.

Listening to Janie’s story gave me similar insights into the children’s prior knowledge and their ability to read social cues. However, in reviewing this story acting session, I was also given insight into the children’s abilities to solve problems, their abilities to collaborate with their peers and some of their home experiences.

Janie's Everyday Story: Making “Muffins”

Janie stands alone in the center of the mat waiting to begin her story. Her hands are in her shirt pockets. She is poised and ready.

Letting her know the camera is on I say, "OK"

Before I can read the story I scribed for Janie that morning, she begins,

" I'm gonna give out muffins tomorrow" she explains.

She stops and I prompt, "Me and Mummy". Janie knows that this means it is time for her friends to join her. She jumps up and beckons her friends to come. She is the director of her own story! They run to join her jumping with excitement.

She continues," We will make them today when I get off the bus. We would need some brownie mix." Janie continuing to direct the action motions to Adam who is playing the 'brownie mix' to join them on the mat. She rubs his head showing her excitement, joy, and affection all in this one gesture for his assistance in the unfolding of her story. She is so caught up in her excitement that she has lost the thread.

I read from her dictated story, "and some sugar". Janie embraces Noah, the 'sugar', as he joins the group.

Suddenly, Adam the ‘brownie mix' has realized something important, "but don't we need a bowl?" he exclaims.

I concur, "Oh, did we forget a bowl? Let's go back and start again." But the children have another idea.

Jack saves the day, volunteering, "I'll be the bowl!" At this point there is a lot of experimentation of how to be a bowl. Jack tries to be a bowl by lying down and raising

his arms and legs, balancing on his lower back to make a 'V' shape, but when the 'sugar' and then 'brownie mix' tried to get in he could not hold the pose.

Mari makes a suggestion, ‘‘Ok, Jack, I was thinking you kinda' go like this" and shows him to lie down and curve arms out and upward Jack tries it out, but it is not satisfactory so we start the story again.

Janie begins as before, "I'm gonna give out muffins" she continues with a little prompting, "to everybody tomorrow. Me and Mommy will make them tomorrow."

I correct as the story she told me says, "today".

‘‘Today", she repeats, "when I get off the bus." The story continues as she told it to me this morning, "We would need some brownie mix and sugar", again plenty of enthusiasm as the children join Janie and she beckons to them. Janie is vibrating with excitement as the 'brownie mix' and 'sugar' enter and embrace as Janie puts out her hand to guide them as she and her 'mother' hover around.

"We will put them in a bowl", I continue. Here Jack quietly enters with his good idea for the bowl.

Adam the 'brownie mix' is always conscious of the problem and asks, "How do we even put them in a bowl?

Jack answers, "we gotta pretend". He sits cross legged on the floor with arms out stretched in a gentle curve.

Adam is putting into action what he thinks should happen, "OK, how ‘bout we just do this?" he and Noah come to the floor and crawl forward to end up lying on the ‘the bowl', now on knees with arms outstretched like a round bowl.

Janie is so excited about the perfect unfolding of her story she is running in circles around the mat.

Mari, who is playing 'mummy', trying to help the bowl suggests," No, do it with your body" and the bowl stands up to enclose the 'ingredients' with gentle bent arms.

"We would add some water and some eggs" I continue Janie's story.

Jack the bowl, now has his arms around Adam, 'the brownie mix', Noah,' the sugar', Corey the eggs', and Lola, 'the water', who is tipping her head so as to pour herself into the bowl.

Janie gets Gailyn who is playing the 'muffin thing' [muffin tin] ready, guiding her to the mat behind the bowl.

"Stir it up together", I say. And again, "We've got to stir it up together." The brownie mix, sugar, eggs, water are all tangled together, arms linked, and 'Mummy' and Janie are miming stirring the ingredients. The 'muffin thing' is waiting behind to have batter poured in.

"We have to pour it in the 'muffin thing' ", I say to move the action along. Mummy and Janie guide the mixed and tangled ingredients to the 'muffin thing'. They hold hands as they are 'poured' in.

"Then we bake it in the oven. When they are done you are all muffins sitting in rows on the mat, right" I direct. The children arrange themselves into rows.

Jack, 'the bowl' has been standing watching all the action and now says, "Oh, I am on the counter!" and takes himself to the far back edge of the mat. Gailyn, 'the muffin thing' joins him to sit on the counter.

Observing the action I say, "The bowl is on the counter" and then reading Janie's story, "When they are done, we put icing on it."

Adam remarks with raised eyebrows ,"Oh the icing." He is now a muffin transformed from a brownie mix just like in real life. The 'icing jar' runs up and sits very still on the mat.

"We get the icing jar", I read.

Mari mimes putting something in the jar. "and a knife and open it. We take the knife to scoop it out."'

Mari and Janie now take Nat, the ' knife', each holding a hand and scoop his hands into the 'jar' then pull him round to the muffin children sitting in rows on the mat. Nat is pulled this way and that..

I read, "Alright, and then we take them to school!" the story ends as the children pick themselves up and put themselves in a line along the table like muffins with icing that Janie and her Mom made. Janie makes a little leprechaun leap to show her delight in this story acting experience.

(Story transcription from January, 2013)

In watching the children enact this story, and then again when I reviewed the video of this story acting, I was deeply impressed by how much they knew about the process of making cupcakes (or “muffins” as Janie called them), their ability to collaborate and their ability to solve the various problems that arose in trying to act this story out. For example, in watching Lola who was chosen to be 'water' in the story I noted that she poured herself into the bowl, but that she also knew that water is often in a measuring cup with a spout. She did not just go into the bowl, her imagination and prior knowledge allowed her to pour herself into the bowl by clasping her hands together over her head stretching up and tipping sideways into the bowl. This was a genuine expression of what she knew was a delight for her and for me. This story provided a real

insight into her experience and knowledge of the everyday world. I was able to observe this playful action because the story acting allowed it to emerge. This is just the kind of knowledge that could be missed if I had not chosen to use the storytelling curriculum with these children. While Janie might have enacted this same kind of motion if she was playing with her friends at playtime, I would most certainly have missed it in our busy classroom. Similarly, as a teacher, I am generally called over when a problem cannot be solved amicably, and I rarely have opportunities to watch how well the children can think through and solve problems together. In reviewing this story acting session, I realized that while many aspects of the story telling curriculum supported the children's language and literacy learning, the story acting phase was particularly useful for allowing me to see communication and thinking skills that would otherwise often be lost to me.

In addition, in terms of collaboration and problem solving, Adam noticed right away that there was no place to put the ingredients for the muffins. Jack offered to be the bowl but then he had to figure out how to "become a bowl" that could hold his friends the 'sugar, brownie mix, eggs, and water'. The children talked among themselves about how best to be a bowl, offering suggestions, and using their bodies to show how to solve it. This problem created a very authentic reason to talk, giving the students time to practice their oral language in the context of solving a problem. In watching and listening I was given the opportunity to see their oral language skills in action and their ability to use gestures and expressions to convey meaning. Later, when there was a conundrum about how to get the children playing the ingredients into the bowl, Jack asserted "we gotta pretend". In reflecting on this assertion I noted that it was a very

logical solution to a problem encountered in play, and a wise bid on Jack's part to remind his friends that their representations do not need to be perfect.

Problem solving could also be seen in the ways that the children worked with "icing" the muffins. In Janie's story the muffins needed "icing" so "Mom", played by Mari, and Janie took a "knife" (played by Nat) and wielded it to ice the "muffins". During this part of the story I witnessed Nat, the "knife", being pulled arm from arm as the girls tried to use both his hands as knives pulling in opposite directions. The resulting action was the knife calling out "oww- oww" and "ooff". The children loved this story so much that they asked to act it out again as soon as we had finished acting it out. The next time the children acted out the story, Nat asked them to be careful. Mari and Janie listened to him and used only one of his arms and took turns using it to ice the muffins. They carefully listened to his request and reflected on their own unsatisfactory experience of the previous story acting. Based on this knowledge they were able to precipitate a change that made more sense to the story, to their friend the "knife" and to themselves. Here was a perfect opportunity for children to problem solve using every day language in an authentic activity.

I was impressed by how they did all of this seamlessly with no intervention from me. Children often have diverse skills and using the storytelling curriculum in the classroom allowed them to exercise these skills in an authentic activity that was meaningful to them. In reflecting on this process I found the children were building knowledge, building confidence (because it was their idea), and having success at solving a problem together. These experiences are just the kinds of things that we hope children will experience in kindergarten and in later schooling.

In thinking about this story acting, I feel I was also given some insight into children's personalities and their home experiences. For example, when Jack, the 'bowl' and Gailyn, the 'muffin thing', placed themselves on the 'counter' in the story, I learned that order may be important to these two children, and that they have learned to put things away when they are finished with them. Without the lens of the storytelling curriculum I might not have had a chance to see what they had noticed in their home experiences, or to discover these aspects of what they know. The children were showing me, without directly telling me, their appreciation for order and that they know to put away baking items when they are done.

In thinking about all the things that the storytelling curriculum allowed me to do as an educator, I was also struck by how it allowed me to assess some of the things the children did not know in an organic and in unobtrusive way. In contrast to the provincial pre-kindergarten screening that can often be a confusing experience for children and an anxiety provoking experience for their parents, the following story helps illustrate how the storytelling curriculum, as a literacy activity, gave me valuable insight into some of the things my students did not yet know.

In early February, I sent a note home asking for children's stories from home. I suggested that the children bring in a photo to share to help them tell their stories. Many of the families responded to this note. The children came in excitedly the next morning from the bus pulling the pictures out of their message bags. When Corey told me his story with his photo, it provided a window into his thinking about sequence and narrative, and I learned a great deal about him, long before we went to the carpet to act it out.

Corey's Story from Home : Once I was Past when I was Born

As the children gather on the carpet after lunch for story time, Corey tells me he, has a story and asks "Can I share too?".

"Of course!" I tell him, and Corey runs to his message bag, producing a photo eagerly. I put this photo up on the easel with Mari's and Noah's . Corey's photo is of a child, who is maybe 3 or 4 years old holding a baby. I assume the child is Corey holding his little brother. But then as I look carefully at the photo, I think, "something is not right". I can't put my finger on what seems wrong, I think maybe the child holding the baby is a much younger Corey, and that maybe he has changed a great deal. When telling time comes, Corey clears up the mystery quickly by explaining this is a photo of his cousin Michael holding Corey as a baby! Corey tells us about Michael and where he used to live and where he lives now.

"This story is about me and my cousin Michael" he begins "Once I was past when I was born. My cousin Michael came to the hospital and seen me and hold me. He was a long way away. He is on the Island, like in Canada. He lives near this place except right through." Corey makes a hand motion as if going around a corner. I am unsure if he is referring to the big turn in the road in the village or some other turn in the road. He does not elaborate when I ask him. Obviously this turn is in his visual memory but he cannot tell me exactly where it is, and he seems to have no place names to help him.

(Field Notes February 7, 2013)

Listening to Corey's story allowed me a window into his thinking. In particular, his telling furnished an opportunity to hear his perspective and his understanding of

time, place and sequence. "Once I was past when I was born." I had observed this kind of confusing explanation during other classroom activities with some concern, but only intuitively recognized that it was sometimes difficult to follow the arc of Corey's talk and thinking. This storytelling allowed me to see and hear his thinking about sequence and place in a pointed way. "He was a long way away. He is on the Island, like in Canada. He lives near this place except right through." Listening to Corey's story helped confirm what I had only intuited before, that he did not seem to have a clear understanding of place or sequence yet. Corey's obvious enthusiasm for the story, his desire to have a turn to tell and his excitement about talking about his cousin Michael provided yet more insights into his identity as a little cousin to this bigger boy, and helped me see him as a whole child in the context of his interests and his family members. The storytelling curriculum, unlike so many pre-fabricated and mandated early literacy activities, allowed Corey to talk about himself and his family, providing me with information about what I needed to work on with Corey, while affirming who he is in the world to himself, and to his peers. Unlike so many standardized assessments that children and parents often experience as confusing and alienating, this activity was useful both pedagogically and socially, as it helped create more space for Corey to be known by his peers and by me, his teacher.

Corey was a reluctant storyteller and was one of the last to bring a photo to the class for sharing. The storytelling curriculum provided a safe and friendly venue for him to practise his skills as a storyteller, and to be encouraged by all of us, which in turn built his confidence in himself as a person and as a performer. By sharing his family lore, Corey was developing relationships with the other students as he framed his story about his birth and stepped into the role of storyteller.

While alphabet recognition assessments give me some useful information about the children in my classroom, the storytelling curriculum enriches the picture I am building of what each specific child can know and how he/she thinks. This is the kind of knowledge that allows me to create intentional teaching opportunities where I can scaffold the children's learning so they can reach new levels of understanding.

Chapter VI: Everyday Stories, Emergent Curriculum and Early Literacy

In listening to the children's stories, I learned what was important to them and what they cared about. It also allowed me to create new opportunities for them to practice their early literacy skills. For example, around the time of Janie's "Muffin" story, another child in the class, Jackie, told us a story about making s'mores with her mum at home. This storytelling led to a whole class activity that included some authentic reasons to write, and multiple opportunities to talk about conventions of print in the context of creating a meaningful text. In the next section, I describe how we worked with Jackie's story in class. This retelling helps illustrate how the storytelling curriculum supported the design of generative, engaging early literacy activities that used alphabetic print literacy for an authentic purpose.

Jackie's S'more Story: Talking about Conventions of Print

Figure 4. Jackie shows photos of making s'mores to illustrate her story.

In mid February, I asked parents to send a photo of a shared activity at home to show us at school. The note inspired some parents to engage in fun activities, photograph them and send them in to share. Jackie's family was one of these families. Her mom photographed the process of making s'mores on a snow day and sent the photos to our class. In one of the photos Jackie was enjoying a really sticky, stringy bite.

In her storytelling, Jackie was able to explain exactly how to make a s'more to her classmates. She told us first the ingredients that we would need and then how to do it. The children were excited, and inspired by the pictures and Jackie's enthusiasm. Jenny had a good idea, " Let's make some s'mores at school!". When I asked the children if they thought this was a good idea, the positive response was overwhelming. I asked

what we would need, and based on Jackie's story the children were able to work together to make a list. After school, I went to the grocery store with their list and purchased the needed items: Graham Crackers, Marshmallows, and Chocolate Chips.

The next morning there was a lot of excitement as children got off the bus. " Ms. Brownlow, did you get the marshmallows?" "Did you get chocolate chips?" There was nothing for it, we had to make the s'mores right away. Jackie reminded us of the process and everyone built their own s'more. Some children arranged their chocolate chips all in the middle of the graham cracker with the marshmallow on top, some put the chips around the edges of the cracker and the marshmallow in the middle, and others put the chips all on top of the marshmallow. We wondered what would happen when we put them in the microwave. Jackie knew but did not tell.

Figure 5. Children build their own s'mores.

We were all amazed at what happened. The marshmallows puffed up to twice their size or bigger, the chips melted in their places on the graham cracker either under or over the marshmallow, and everything was warm. The next step, according to Jackie, was to put the second graham cracker on top, and we all knew what to do next!

Figure 6. Eating the sticky, sweet, delicious s'more.

Once we had eaten the delicious, sticky , sweet s'mores the children wanted to tell the other kindergarten class how to make them. After hand washing and recess the children came to the mat. I had recently been to a workshop about engaging children in shared writing, an activity which has the children coming up with an idea and then writing it down as a group, sharing the pen. We spent some time deciding what to write and then the children took turns writing the "How To" for s'mores. They were engaged

and excited, inspired by this real experience to write what they knew.

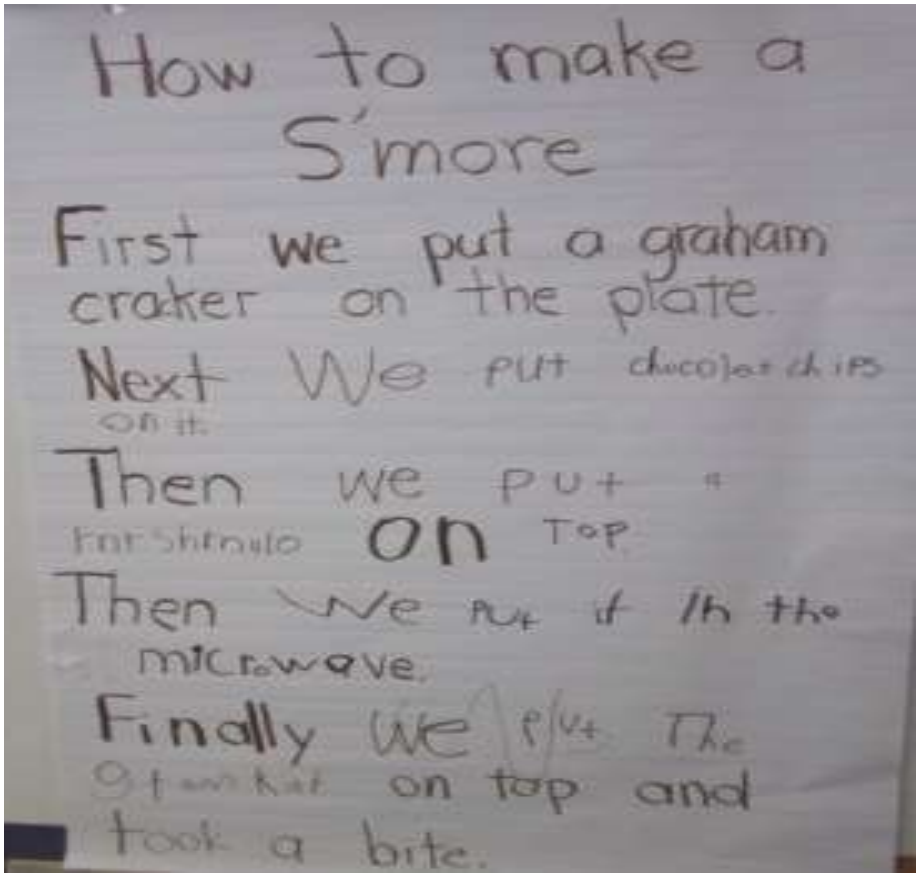

Figure 7. Our interactive procedural writing.

During this activity, they were learning the value of writing and having the motivation of writing with a purpose. These two ideas are central to our literacy mandate at school and were eagerly met through the storytelling curriculum. This experience was not a mini lesson on procedural writing. It was a seamless connection between the children's interests and what I needed to teach. We took the "recipe" and the ingredients to Kindergarten B. They sent a note thanking us for the instructions and the treat. A visiting Literacy Coach also saw the writing and left a note telling the children what a good job they had done telling how to make s'mores. The give and take of writing

was so natural from the "How To" writing, to the notes in response, it felt like an excellent everyday use of language!

The children's experience guided their desire to learn. In this instance, I accepted the opportunity and provided the materials for further exploration. In the process, many outcomes were being met and great learning was taking place. For instance: the children were experiencing transformation. They were finding out what happens when heat is applied to marshmallows and chocolate. Their five senses were engaged and they were talking about what happened, how it happened, how it felt, what it tasted like, how it looked, why it looked that way. I observed the rich possibilities for language exploration as the children shared their ideas and thoughts. When the suggestion was made to share the treat and how to make it, I again followed the interests of the children. I scaffolded the learning by allowing the children to write what they had experienced.

This shared writing activity allowed me to guide the children's understanding of sequence and procedural writing but in the context of the children's interest and desire to share with their peers in the other Kindergarten class. This was not a planned outcome for the experience and became more than incidental learning because it took on a life of its own. This is the true nature of emergent learning. The experience became a rich opportunity for learning about language. The children were highly motivated to write because they wanted to share the recipe. This allowed me an opportunity for assessing the children's understanding of sequence, letter/ sound recognition, and the understanding of the process they experienced. Some children were interested in reading the recipe we had created. They began by looking for words they knew and made attempts to read based on our interactive writing activity. The entire activity, from

writing to constructing the s'mores took about forty minutes. What a rewarding time we had, speaking, listening, writing , collaborating, reading and making s'mores.

While this activity could have been created without using the storytelling curriculum, it was Jackie's story from home that had inspired the cooking and the writing and it was the storytelling curriculum that provided space for this sharing. In addition, I believe it was watching how much I learned from using the storytelling curriculum that gave me the confidence to keep following the children's leads and gave them the confidence to tell me what they wanted to do.

Since joining the public school system, I feel that I have been given many suggestions for teaching elements of literacy separately in teacher directed mini-lessons. Department of Education support materials and school board workshops make it seem that literacy learning only happens during "the literacy block". Yet, it is apparent to me that Jackie's sharing of her story from home, the experience of making the s'mores and finally our collaboration to write the recipe to share made the activity much richer and more meaningful experience for the children than many of the "stand alone" activities that are often recommended. Our writing made sense in the context of their interests and consequently became part of their lived experience. The storytelling curriculum offered an opportunity for this experience to evolve, a procedural writing lesson based on the interests of the students. Some curricular outcomes were met through this meaningful experience with the children. In my experience, a teacher directed mini lesson on procedural writing does not match the energy and excitement generated by this activity The learning is deeper because it is owned by the children.

While they giggled remembering the marshmallows puffing up, they also had an experience that provided a great reason to write,, and that writing can help us share fun ideas. When acting on the interests of the children, the teacher can provide an experience that is meaningful and make assessments that are authentic based on genuine experiences of the students. This in turn provides powerful, developmentally appropriate learning. The children have gained knowledge of the value of writing. After we wrote the recipe and shared it with the other class, they in turn wrote a note to us in appreciation. Two of the outcomes for emerging literacy in our province are that children experience writing a simple message and writing for a purpose. Both outcomes were met beautifully through listening to the children's interests and acting on those observations.

This storytelling activity helped to reveal the children's interests. Acknowledging their interest in the s'mores validated their ideas. This allowed the children to be engaged in their own learning. When they are engaged they are motivated, which in turn allowed me to scaffold their learning. In this instance the storytelling allowed us to extend the literacy learning to writing with meaning and purpose, and to explore the procedural writing genre. While the storytelling allowed me as an educator to do many things, through my analysis I found that this approach also allowed the children to do many things. I shall discuss these in the next chapter.

Chapter VII: The Storytelling Curriculum and Children

In analyzing my data I learned a great deal about what this approach allowed the children to do. For example, I found it allowed them to: (a) learn using multimodal ways of communicating; b) experience and build social relationships; (c) experience authentic opportunities for rich language use; (d) be engaged in play-based learning; (e) collaborate with their peers; (f) engage in purposeful problem solving; (g) be involved in genuine meaningful and purposeful editing, writing, writing genres and retellings; (h) gain deeper understanding of story and narrative; and (i) create a learning community. In this chapter, I illustrate some of these findings using examples from the data.

Multimodal Ways of Communicating and Building Relationships

Throughout my analysis I was continually struck by how the storytelling approach provided ways for the children to demonstrate their understandings in multimodal ways and to build relationships with their classmates. In contrast to typical "school" activities such as paper and pencil worksheets, the storytelling curriculum created opportunities for the children to use their bodies and their understandings of visual and aural representation to convey meaning, and as a result they created and deepened friendships with their peers. While many educators in early childhood and elementary school have been trying diligently to integrate multimodal meaning making into their classrooms (Kendrick, 2005; Wohlwend, 2008), and while many scholars have been arguing for the need to recognize the importance of multimodal or "multi sensory, learning opportunities" (Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart, 2009, p.2) in our current era, the storytelling curriculum can open these opportunities and puts value on them. Similarly,

while many educators and scholars have argued for the importance of creating learning communities and allowing children to build relationships while they learn, the storytelling approach works to do just this without any extra work on the part of the teacher. The following story helps illustrate how sharing narratives creates space for children to use multimodal ways of making meaning and building relationships with their peers.

Adam's Blue Dinosaur Story: Incorporating Multimodal Learning

On a cold January morning after recess the children excitedly gather on the carpet for another story dramatization. They all want to be a part of the story acting now as they understand what the dramatization entails. This morning Adam is the director of his story about a Blue Dinosaur. When it seems that all the parts have been handed out, Lola becomes very concerned that Adam seems to have only chosen boys.

"You don't, it doesn't have to be all boys!" she asserts.

I confirm what parts have been chosen, checking to see that Adam has all he needs to allow the story to unfold, "So you have yourself, and you have a dinosaur, and you have the jewels, do you need a volcano?"

Hands shoot up "Adam, Adam, me, me, me!" and Adam is in the delightful, or uncomfortable, position of having to select someone to be the volcano.

"Um, yeah. I'll pick Noah".

Lola restates her concern, reminding us "It doesn't have to be a boy."

Adam's classmates put a little pressure on him as someone remarks. "He only picks boys".

So Adam quickly responds "I'm gonna pick a girl."

Jack looks around at the cast and insists that, "there are none left." Meaning there are no more roles.

Adam looks around a little disconcerted now that he had made up his mind to add a girl to the mix, "Isn't there, yes there is..." He is thinking, trying to visualize his story, "Well actually, I forgot."

Trying to help him I review who he has so far, "There is a blue Dinosaur, there's a T-Rex, there's... is there another dinosaur?"

Adam responds, "I forgot one, I think."

Trying to help him establish how many dinosaurs I ask "Adam, are there two dinosaurs?"

Adam thinks and then says, "I forgot one . There is a Pterodactyl." Those without parts in the drama shoot their hands up waving, some are looking pointedly at Adam with big eyes, arms stretched up and mouths open in expectation.

I look to Adam and agree, "OK, a Pterodactyl."

Adam wants us to understand what this part entails explaining, "But the Pterodactyl flew up there and then he like, um, shot the missiles out".

We will need to know where the Pterodactyl who shoots missiles will go in the story. "And where would I put the Pterodactyl ?" , I ask.

Adam thinks for a minute, then responds, "I think in the middle of the story." Now there is some competition for the part of the Pterodactyl.

Knowing Adam has said he is going to pick a girl, Jackie and Lola pipe up, "Me, me!" Adam sticking to his decision, selects Jackie, "Jackie is going to be the Pterodactyl. You get to shoot missiles."

I think we are ready to begin the story acting and inquire, "Right, are we ready?" The action is ready to begin. I read the story Adam dictated this morning, "Well, I watched a video about dinosaurs. The story was about the blue dinosaur." The audience whispers reminders to the blue dinosaur character to enter the action. I continue to read as the blue dinosaur walks to the center of the stage, "The story was about the blue dinosaur. He tried to take the jewels." Noah, The blue dinosaur runs flapping his hands and arms saying, "E_R_R_R!"

I read, "The T-Rex dinosaur tried to take the jewels." Nat, the T-Rex, flaps around, looking big and walks wide legged across the stage.

I try to reconfirm who is who in the story, "Who is the T-Rex?"

Nat growls, "I am!"

Adam, directing a little bit, says, "Then actually he crashed."

I read, "Then he crashed to the ground." Adam has entered and is crouching on the ground near the action offering direction to the dinosaurs who look at him to see what he wants them to do. I read more of the story as the action races forward with the words, "It was in a hole, the Pterodactyl flew up."

Adam directs using minimal words but lots of gestures ,"You can..." he says and then points arms down and turns his body to show the place on the floor he wants them to be. The T-Rex has his arms high as he looks to Adam for direction and the blue dinosaur is on the ground head on arms and bum in the air. The Pterodactyl is hovering round the group.

I read, "When he was there and when he was up he threw missiles in the air. Missiles Out!"

Adam directs with his arms shooting them forward and affirms, "Yeah, you come out."

I confirm, directing, "Throwing out missiles."

The action heats up as I read the exciting part of the story, "Then the blue dinosaur was in a hole, then they were on top, on a volcano."

Excited, Adam shouts, "Yeah the volcano!" Ollie, our volcano, runs to the edge of the action, places his legs wide and his arms out in a 'V'.

I continue to read, "The big dinosaur went after the jewels." At this point, Noah, the T-Rex is on the floor on his side near the volcano, Nat, the blue dinosaur turns and jumps toward "the volcano" then crawls through Noah's volcano legs after the jewels and the T-Rex.

I read, "And then he chased them into the volcano." Adam is in the volcano, the Pterodactyl is hovering over the volcano and the T-Rex and blue dinosaur are inside the volcano! It is very exciting indeed.

I read, "The volcano went down, the only place you could get out was the tunnel." All are looking and thinking about the action. I read a bit more, "It dried up, and then he crashed out of the volcano because he was really, really strong." As I read this, Ollie, the volcano bends over to see who is inside and then puts his legs together as the volcano "dries up".

Adam is directing Nat, the blue dinosaur, to push out through the volcanoes legs. The volcano is surprised and delighted as he puts his hands on the exiting dinosaur.

Blue dinosaur leans toward the floor looks back through the volcano and says," I was thinking" [about how to show he is exploding], then makes an exploding noise, "tcho-o-o-o!" so we knew the volcano had indeed erupted.

Then the T-Rex shouts ,"I got the jewels, Yeah!" as he grabs them from the now crouching blue dinosaur. Adam and the volcano look on.

In this story acting session, as in many others, I was given an opportunity to gain an understanding of what the children in my class were interested in, and how they forged stories from those interests. In talking to Adam and in watching the drama unfold I learned that he based this story on a video game he had played at home. The focus on the narrative allowed me to see his interpretation of the game and his organization of the story. For example, Adam identified the important parts for him, and when they happened in the story.

However, in reviewing the video of this story acting session and my field notes, I found this story also helped me see how the storytelling approach created space for the children to use multimodal (kinetic, verbal, aural) ways of making meaning. For example, during this story acting I observed Noah's thinking and his ability to use his body symbolically. When Noah ran to the edge of the action on the mat, opened his legs wide, and threw his arms up to create a volcano, he seemed to know exactly where he needed to be and what he needed to do, without any direction. Noah might have had a hard time telling me orally how a volcano should look, but he knew exactly what to do to create a volcano shape, and where he should be on the stage as he threw himself into the action. In this instance, I was given a small window into what Noah knew about volcanoes: that they are an upside down 'V' and have an opening at the top. I was impressed by his confident participation, as Noah was not nearly as forthcoming in the typical question-answer sessions or turn and talks we might have on the mat. In this way, I recognized that the storytelling curriculum was allowing the children to practice and

show their multimodal meaning making skills in a way that few other literacy activities could.

In reviewing this story acting I was also impressed by the way the children interacted together. During the story acting, the children were constantly reading their friends' body language and making adjustments to their actions to fit the story. Adam's story as it was acted out, was a testament to their ability to improvise. I was struck by how they all brought their own interpretation to the story and how it flowed smoothly, with each of them accepting the actions of the others as reasonable interpretations of what Adam meant. They were building on their own knowledge of story, of jewels, of dinosaurs, of volcanoes and explosions and things drying up. In a way, this improvisation also provided me insights into the thinking of the class as an organism and how it operated.

What was also impressive about this story acting session was the way it allowed the children to build community, and helped us set class standards for fairness and inclusion. In Adam's story, I could almost see the cogs turning in his head as the story began to unfold. This was particularly the case as he realized Lola had a legitimate complaint, and the Pterodactyl was missing. When he was confronted with the need to be fair to his classmates, and he noticed that he had forgotten the Pterodactyl, we did some editing on the spot, and added the needed character. This decision warranted choosing another class member to play a dinosaur and some negotiation with his peers. In this instance, we can see how story acting allowed the children to enter into a discussion of social dynamics and fairness. During this interaction, I was able to quietly observe how the children solved this problem. Adam was important to the solution as he chose a new character for his story, however, his peers contributed as well.

This kind of interaction might have never come up, or may have gone unnoticed in a busy classroom, if all the children were playing in their own areas with their familiar small group of friends, but, here, during our story acting, with all of us present, we could witness the problem and the solution, setting a new standard for other interactions in our class and outside. In this moment, I was able to witness relationship building in action and I could reference this kind of inclusive thinking if, or when, the issue of fairness came up again.

The following narrative session similarly helped me see how important telling stories was to helping the children build relationships with each other and how it helped scaffold their oral language skills.

Nat's Story from Home: Lego Land

As a result of a parent note sent home on the 25th of January requesting family stories Nat brought in his pictures and story.

Lunchtime is almost over this bright cold afternoon. The children are eating their lunches. As they put away their lunch kits they know to go quietly to the mat and select a book to 'read' as they wait for all to be done. Nat is finished and anxious for his turn to tell his story. I encourage him to read a book about sea animals while he waits for the last few children to wind up their lunch, as the class is very involved in an undersea exploration project. When everyone has tucked away their lunch kits we listen and dance to Brent Holmes sing "Under The Coral Reef" and look at the beautiful underwater photography of graceful sea creatures on the coral reef. This body break

provides the movement we need to be ready to listen to Nat's story. As our body break comes to a close, Nat asks to share his story.

He goes to his message bag to bring out a "Snap-fish" photo album that his mother has created of a trip to Florida his family took the previous March Break . At first his voice is very soft and he seems shy to tell about the pictures. I ask who is in the pictures.

"Zack and Dad" he says softly. "We went to see Grammy and Pop-Pop".

I ask what is happening in the pictures.

"We played in the pool." He replies. He continues to need a few prompts from his friends and I to get going. He tells us that he went there with his family. He holds the book up to look at it himself and needs a reminder to hold it so that his friends can see it too. He shows us pictures of his uncle, cousins, Grammy and Pop- Pop. There are pictures of Nat and his brother and cousins in the pool and with tropical foliage in the back ground. Nat turns the page and transports us to Lego Land. This is when something interesting happens, something that engages all the children. Nat's face brightens, his friends lean in, he becomes very animated and his voice becomes louder as he talks about the rides and the characters in Lego Land. All the children are excited about Nat's adventure and the information and pictures he is showing. They ask many questions and offer their knowledge of Lego. Nat enjoys telling about his time there and has warmed up to the storytelling time with this incentive.

(Field notes, January 29, 2013)

Figure 8. Showing pictures of the LEGO land trip.

During this everyday storytelling activity Nat had many opportunities to develop his oral language skills. He also had the opportunity to collaborate with his peers, to build his social relationships in the class, and to engage in purposeful problem solving.

In looking at the kinds of opportunities Nat had to develop his oral language skills, it is worth noting that during this storytelling session, he was supported by photos to remind him and help guide his story. He was telling about something that he loves- a visit to his grandparents in Florida and to LEGO Land. At first he was not confident in the telling and required many prompts to get started, but as he became more comfortable in the Storyteller's Chair, he began to gather momentum. By the time he got to the LEGO Land pictures he was wound up and ready to go. I think this is also an area of strong interest for Nat and for his listening buddies. This is substantiated by notes from

my observer's comments in the field notes, "He obviously had strong and visceral memories of the place and this was contagious." Some of his friends had been to LEGO Land and were able to share their observations. This added to the story and to their understanding by the use of language. I noted the give and take of language, the fluid back and forth.

Children need experience with language to become proficient with it. Allowing them to choose a topic of interest to them ensures that there will be interest and conversation. Here they experimented with questions and sharing their own knowledge of the topic. This was an authentic real life experience which allowed me to observe firsthand what the students know about speaking and listening and using language to develope a narrative. This story, based on a genuine experience, allowed me to authentically assess how the children were using descriptive oral language to tell a story.

I also noticed the strong element of voice as Nat described and told about his experience there in LEGO Land. His story became more well developed and his excitement and enthusiasm were evident as he warmed to his adventure. He was encouraged by his friends' interest in the topic which provided incentive for him to add details. Oral language is the base of all other literacy so telling the story first gives Nat a strong foundation for drawing and writing the story after he has told it. . Before Nat can write his story he has to have lived it, the experience he brings gives the story vitality. Telling the story allows him to organize his thoughts and tell what he wants us to know. When he is asked to write it, he has an idea formulated already and this contributes to a representation in drawing and in writing. His ideas about his experience become much more detailed and rich as a result of this sharing.

If we consider some elements that teachers use for evaluating children's writing, one of these elements is "Voice", addressing such questions as: How do you know this story belongs to this child? What kind of language do children use to make the story their own? What kind of punctuation would they use if writing the story? (adapted from Trehearne, 2000, p.336; 2004, p. 306-309). When listening to a child tell a story orally it quickly becomes evident what kind of "voice" they intend. It comes across in inflection, fluent telling, and enthusiasm. Hearing Nat's enthusiasm for this topic allowed me to hear his voice. Most five year olds are not able to write everything they want to say; hearing Nat tell the story allowed me to hear his voice as he tells the story to his friends. He is using oral language to get across an idea. We often cannot see voice so much in the written work of a five year old, but we can certainly hear it when they tell stories orally. Once a story has been heard, the teacher can scaffold the telling to the writing, elevating the learning to a new level, encouraging the young writer to use some of the describing words the child used orally, and adding punctuation to give the written piece voice. This oral telling allows the teacher to hear first, and scaffold later, providing an opportunity to talk about what she heard and what the child said.

In this section I have explored how the storytelling curriculum can offer multimodal learning and relationship building to children. In addition, I have described how the storytelling curriculum can allow children to express themselves orally so that their teachers can hear their voice and help translate that to the page. In the following chapter, I will discuss what adding a video camera to the storytelling curriculum can offer children and teachers.

Chapter VIII: Video Recording Our Stories

During the story telling and story acting time I often used a video camera to record the children's story telling and the dramatizations of their stories. The choice to include the camera, began with a desire to capture data for my research, and yet, by the end of my study, I found having the camera was vital to enhancing our learning together. These video recordings became powerful resources for scaffolding the children's learning and extending our discussions. In this chapter, I explore my third research question: What does adding a video camera to the storytelling curriculum allow teachers and students to do? I share the insights that developed as I used a video camera to record and review our stories. In the next chapter, I offer a general discussion of all of my findings, and in the final chapter, I offer some suggestions for future researchers, educators, teacher educators, administrators and policy writers.

Adding a Video Camera

Adding a video camera to the storytelling curriculum provided many opportunities for learning. While some researchers use video cameras to collect data, their focus has generally been on the narratives and the play acting.

I have found that there are videos made of Paley herself showing how the storytelling curriculum works with children. These recordings are used for demonstrating the process and while the children are video recorded during the story-acting, there is no follow up transcription and analysis of the video. From my reading, I understand that Paley used a tape recorder and transcribed the children's stories from these recordings. The video recording gives the added dimension of the children's

actions to the dialogue. It also makes it possible to "hear" the voice, inflection and to observe movement, and interactions.

In a study of oral language, storytelling and the use of video with young children, MacIntyre (2014) reports that video recordings can promote oral language, and can encourage students to reflect on and improve their literacy skills. However, I have yet to find any research that speaks directly to using a video camera with Paley's storytelling curriculum.

In reflecting on what the video recording allowed the children and me to do , I would say that on a very basic level, the video recording allowed us to capture the action of the story acting and to see it again. There is nothing quite like watching a video of children in action, to remind a viewer that the action happens very quickly and is so ephemeral. As a teacher watching the video and transcribing the dialogue and action, I had ample opportunity to reflect on the children's actions and their abilities to synthesize and use experiences to interpret the stories of their peers. These observations are a window into the children's thinking. For the children, adding a video camera seemed to provide important opportunities for them to reflect on aspects of their stories, and seemed to inspire a range of discussions about chronology and significance. In the following section, I describe how I introduced the camera and my early discoveries about adding the camera to the process. The camera was introduced as a means of capturing the ephemeral action of the story acting initially so that I could review it. It also offerd the children an opportunity to deepen their learning by seeing the action again. The video offerd me an opportunity to share with the children the observations I had made about collaboration, interpretation, story construction, and editing. I then

discuss in more detal what adding the video camera to the storytelling curriculum offered me as a teacher, and what it seemed to offer the children..

Introducing the camera.

I introduced the camera slowly to the process of the storytelling curriculum. Sometimes we used the video recorder to record storytelling, and sometimes we used it to record story acting sessions. I introduced the camera gradually, because I realized that initially, we were still getting comfortable being storytellers. Early in the process of adding the camera, I discovered that the video recorder made some children self-conscious, especially when they were alone in the story chair, while others rose to the occasion easily and really enjoyed being on camera. The following two field notes capture some of what I learned about the children's level of comfort with the camera. For example, when Jackie was asked to tell her naming story on camera she appeared nervous and somewhat shy.

Jackie is sitting in the story chair; she is the first to tell her naming story. She is wearing a blue top with sequins. She is twisting the sequins on her shirt and looks down at it, rocking a bit in the chair. She looks unsure. She begins to speak softly and requires some prompts about her name from the notes her mother has sent. "My first name my mom gave me and my next name came from TV"(she looks at the camera, tongue stuck up over top lip and then licks her lips). I prompt for middle name.

(Fieldnote, November, 2012)

In reviewing videos of some of other children, I noted that some of them seemed naturally at ease and were delighted to tell their stories to the camera. For example, Mari told us her naming story happily and without any sign of shyness.

Mari sits in the story chair, confident, rocking. She is wearing a black top, a purple head band and black leggings.

"My mom named me it because it was, um, my mommy's, when she was playing basket ball that place was named Maristar Gardens. And then she named me with Mari from that... Now I'm done." (pushes up on the arms of the chair and stands up, looks at Ms. B and goes back to the mat). (Transcription November, 2012) (clarified with phone call to Mom on Jan. 25, 2014 – Mom was watching, rather than playing basketball.)

What Adding the Camera Offered Me

Reviewing the video recording of these naming stories gave me useful insight into these children's personalities, and a broader picture of them as whole children. Without these recordings I might not have noticed, or remembered, how different these children were in terms of their relationship to being filmed. I also would not have had a record to show how that relationship changed or didn't change as time passed.

The video camera allowed me to really see as well as hear the children and their interactions. It allowed me to see the development of relationships as children worked together to make the story come to life, solve problems, such as how to blow up, or go to pieces, even how to become a bowl, or a couch, or a dinosaur, or a drive through restaurant, or a family photograph. It allowed me to see children's strengths in a whole new way.

Reviewing the videos allowed me to listen carefully to the words and actions of the children. In this careful listening and observing, a teacher can discover what children are good at. For instance when Corey came to Jackie's rescue and explained how to blow up, I developed a new understanding of him. First of all, he recognized she needed help, second, he took action to help her, and third, he gave clear directions so that she could play her part. These are all insights that may have happened so quickly they would go unnoticed, but with the video I was able to capture it, and recognize it, and bring it to the attention of the student, thus building his confidence, and acknowledging his abilities and strengths.

Using the camera to film the story also provided an added focus to our story acting and required that everyone work together. Having this kind of a shared goal is an important aspect of a dynamic kindergarten classroom building relationships and developing community. The video recordings of the story acting and storytelling curriculum allowed me to see this evolve.

What Adding the Video Camera Offered the Children

In working with the children, I recognized that it was often hard for them to remember what they had said during story telling time. This made sense to me, as storytelling is a kind of performance, and managing everything you want to say, and saying it how you want to say it, requires a great deal from a performer. After a performance it can be difficult to recall what was actually said. Hearing the story again as we played the video recordings allowed the students to reflect on their stories, and to hear their sequence and organization, as well as their own voices. When they heard and

saw themselves, the learning became deep and meaningful, taking them to a new level of understanding of the idea of story, and what they wanted to write. Telling and then acting the story allows the children to experience deeper understanding than telling them about how to make a story. Watching the videos also helped us to begin conversations about the notion of a story genres of writing (s'more story) and editing (see below: Santa Claus Parade) . The following story helps illustrate what adding a video camera to the storytelling curriculum offered the children as storytellers, and as emerging readers and writers, and what it offered me as their teacher, trying to support their learning in these areas.

Jack's Everyday Story: Opportunities for Meaningful, Purposeful Editing

One day after lunch the children remind me that it is story acting time. Whose story will we tell today? We decide that Jack will have his turn. We try to begin but experience some difficulty getting organized. Jack stands in the middle of the mat (stage) wearing a red shirt and grey jogging pants. He looks up, raises his arms and flops them down, perhaps with a note of exasperation that we have to do it again. As we get ready to start again I say, "Ready, set..." but before I can say 'go', Jack is ready to begin:
"I went to the Santa Claus Parade!" he says, and then stops. I prompt from his story, "and I went with...". Jack jumps in quickly with the names of the friends he went with, "Simon and Rachel". Corey and Jackie, the actors who will play Simon and Rachel, run up beside Jack and stand smiling next to him.

I continue reading from Jack's dictated story, "It was beside McDonald's."

Jack is agitated because the person who is to play 'McDonald's' has not joined them. He asks, "Who's McDonald's?"

Immediately Gailyn enters, as 'McDonald's'. Corey is jumping up and down with hands balled into fists shooting them up in the air and then down beside his shoulders, his mouth is wide open with excitement that the story is unfolding and he is in it with his best friend.

I give some direction because Gailyn has moved out of camera range, off the mat. "You have to be on the mat though, or I can't see you." I say and then I offer a little direction, "So you're going to stand by the road."

Gailyn returns to mat and stands with legs apart looking at Jack. He is pointing at her as he realizes if she is McDonald's then, "I have to be inside of you!" He quickly drops to floor and crawls over and through Gailyn's legs to be inside the restaurant.

I go on with the story, "I saw fire trucks."

But Jack is clearly distraught after he has crawled into the restaurant but is alone in there. He shouts to his friends, "Inside of you!", after crawling in, he turns to look back at 'Simon' and 'Rachel' who are standing waiting to see what to do next.

Jack repeats loudly, "Inside of you! Inside the McDonald's!" Jack is looking at them pointing his fingers and saying, "Inside McDonald's" wanting them to join him. Jack stands and points to his friends and says with clear direction this time, "Come inside McDonald's."

Corey realizes what he means, drops to the floor and crawls toward McDonald's. Jackie continues to stand unsure of crawling in. Looking on I see that the parade needs to appear.

Keeping the momentum I read, "I saw fire trucks and police cars". The children who are the police car and fire truck begin to crawl around the mat.

Adam begins to crawl behind Jack going, "Ahl-ahl". This is his rendition of a siren.

Worried that she has been left out, Lola interjects, "No, I'm the fire truck!"

Encouraging her I say, "Go ahead, go."

Adam is now crawling around the stage (mat) saying, "Ahl-Ahl".

Jackie is behind Corey. Corey stops and looks at me, and then at Jack. Jack continues to beckon to Jackie and Corey. Lola, 'the fire truck', joins Adam on the stage crawling around in front of 'McDonald's'. Jackie waits for Corey to crawl inside McDonald's.

Jack urges them, "Come inside, sit down!" Jack is now sitting cross legged as Corey crawls in to join him. Lola and Adam who are in the parade, are crawling around the mat and are coming closer to McDonald's.

Jack energetically calls out, "The happy meal, we need it !" Jackie finally decides to go inside McDonald's, but chooses to walk around Gailyn to join Jack and Corey sitting down on the floor.

Jack sticks head out the door of Gailyn's legs, and says, "Happy meal where are you?"

Adam and Lola continue to crawl around in front of McDonald's being police cars and fire trucks.

"Happy Meal where are you?" calls Jack again.

Looking at the group of actors off the camera. I read again, describing what happens inside the restaurant, to keep the action going, "We were climbing on the climber and we ate there and I got a happy meal."

Jack is more focused on the meal than on the action of climbing, he beckons to Janie, playing 'the Happy Meal' and says, "Where are you Happy Meal"?

Janie joins them, while Jackie, Corey and Jack all make eating noises "Ahmm-yum-yum" and reach their hands toward the happy meal.

I notice Noah standing near me waiting, I ask, "So Noah, who are you?"

"Santa" he whispers.

I read, "I saw Santa at the end".

Noah enters swinging his arms and tipping his head sideways toward the direction he is walking saying, "Ahnnnn" then he jumps up, falls to the floor to crawl in front of McDonald's along with the police car and fire engine becoming part of the Santa Claus parade.

Jack sticks his head out of the restaurant and shouts, " Hi, Santa"!

Nearing the end I read, "Then I went to Nanny's house".

Jack throws his head and body out of McDonald's, arms extended sideways. I notice Gailyn is holding his head near his ears in a gentle quieting gesture. Then Jack shouts, "Where is Nanny's house?" He means who is playing Nanny's house, and where are they.

As the play is winding down I give a little needed direction, "You're just coming over here to Nanny's house." Pointing to a place on the mat. Children in the play are now running off the stage.

I read the end, "Then I drived home". Jack jogs by camera around the stage with hands miming holding a steering wheel as if driving making a 'b-r-r-r m-ing' noise to sound like a car. Jackie and Corey follow. Lots of giggling and laughter and movement as the play ends and children gather on the outside of the mat.

(From Transcription, January 2013)

Developing an understanding of specific genres of writing is an expected outcome for literacy learning in our school, as it is in many schools around the world. In schools across PEI, teachers are expected to teach: persuasive, procedural, and narrative forms of writing to the children. We are also expected to teach the concept of editing. In Kindergarten, teaching these genres and aspects of writing may look a bit different than it does with older children. For example, when we are trying to teach the idea that writers draft and then revise our work, we may begin with a conversation about a drawing. In conferencing with a child about his/her drawing we may ask, "Is it night or day?" or "Who was there?" These kinds of questions encourage the children to start thinking about their intended audiences and return to their drawings and to add details. These drawings, as they begin to record their stories in images, are the stories. When the children use alphabetic print to record their stories, we ask things like: Where did it happen? What colors did you see? How did it feel? In doing so, we draw out the story and the children learn that drafting and editing are part of the writing process.

Watching how Jack responded to the story acting of his story and the video recording of it, allowed me to discover the value of video recording the story acting for extending the children's learning. In this instance, the video recording helped us to think about editing. When we watched this video on the screen, Jack suddenly called out, "That's not how it happened!". This interjection began a conversation about what needed to be different in his story; moving from what he remembered, to how it looked in our dramatization. Watching the video established revision as a legitimate practice for writers and storytellers. Jack elaborated and told us his trip to the parade "didn't happen that way", that they went to McDonald's after the parade. Here we had an opportunity to

'edit' his story in an authentic encounter with narrative and with language. It was an unexpected learning and one that we all participated in with enthusiasm.

Because of Jack's interest and investment in his story, I was able to scaffold his learning in the area of editing and sequencing of events, two areas that might be difficult for a five year old in journal writing. This opportunity for learning also provided me with a deeper understanding of Jack and his perception of the event, providing authentic, developmentally appropriate assessment and material for future discussions with him. It was evident that Jack was enthusiastic, excited, and proud to have his story being dramatized. In reviewing the video, I witnessed his engagement as he sat “in the McDonald's” and urged his friends to join him. Watching these moments I had glimpses of what was important to him, for example, he was keen on finding the Happy Meal to participate in the acting out, but he did not focus so much on climbing on the climber, even though this was initially a part of his telling.

The storytelling allowed me, as a teacher, to acknowledge Jack's interests by listening intently to him as he dictated his story. However, video recording this acting allowed Jack to have a new perspective on his story, and to make changes to it later. I believe he was only able to see this because we had dramatized it and recorded it. This video recording gave Jack an opportunity to see and hear his own words. It came alive for him on the screen. Watching the video provided a meaningful opportunity to reflect on the story that would not have been as powerful if it had been a one-on-one conference with Jack about his picture or his writing.

In addition, during these sessions, Jack was involved in his own learning by helping represent a genuine lived experience. In telling the story and then recording it, Jack was able to create an extended narrative. This stands in contrast to what children

often produce when faced with a blank piece of paper and asked to “make a story or a drawing”. In that kind of situation, Jack may have produced one line: "I went to the Santa Claus Parade" or “I went to the Santa Claus Parade with Simon and Rachel”, either of which are really barely a story. Indeed, the fact that he was telling me the story, knowing that we generally act out our writing, may have inspired him to tell me as much as he could so that he could see his memory come to life with his friends playing many parts. Jack knew the story would be performed and was aware of having an audience. This is a significant element of the storytelling. As children began to realize their story would be performed the stories became more detailed and as a result the written stories became more detailed too. This everyday story was a skeleton on which the very rich drama unfolded and was acted out. When we watched the video of the storytelling we added a deeper learning about what to do when you want to change a story, and that stories can be revisited and changed.

Open to the unexpected.

Using the video camera with the storytelling curriculum allowed the children and me to be open to the unexpected. It posed possibilities for deeper learning and allowed me to observe and individualize the learning for each student. The benefits of the video recording were often different than what I expected. It allowed me to see the skills the children already had or were ready to develop. Catching Jack transforming himself into "a CD"' in Noah’s story (see pre- Chapter one) was something I only noticed when reviewing the video. I would have missed this moment entirely if the camera had not been a part of the process. The improvisation makes the story acting exciting, the video records it and subsequently allows insight into children's ability to problem solve. What

I find fascinating, and can see on the video recording, is the total immersion in the story and willing participation by everyone in making the story unfold. If there is a question of how to do something, they work it out together. This aspect is difficult to catch when the story-acting is happening, but upon review the children and the teacher can see the participation and cooperation. They own the action. Using the video camera makes this evident as the stories are reviewed and transcribed. With the help of the camera the storytelling curriculum creates a classroom open to what the children have to offer. It allows the teacher to measure children against themselves, not against the norm for this age group. The video recording also allows children to see what they have accomplished, which is much too difficult to do if you are a participant engaged in the action, or the teacher directing the action. The power of the video recording is evident in the rich understanding it offers to the teacher researcher and the depth of learning it offers children.

In this chapter, I shared more of the children's stories, and discussed the power of video recording. In the next chapter, I discuss my findings and make connections between what I discovered as I conducted this research project, and the research literature.

Chapter IX: Discussion

In this chapter, I summarize the findings of this study and discuss them in the context of findings from other studies in the research literature. Included in this chapter is a consideration of how the findings of this study challenge some current practices in early childhood literacy classrooms and some of the implications of this analysis for teachers, administrators, faculties of education, ministries of education and future researchers.

When I began this project, I thought I would be learning how to improve children's ability to draw and write their stories after telling them, hearing them read and acting them out. I wondered if the storytelling curriculum would provide opportunities for using oral language, and if so, could it scaffold the children's use of language both oral and written. I also wondered if it would strengthen and enhance the children's reading skills. However, in conducting this study, I learned so much more. I found the storytelling curriculum provided even more than I had considered.

As I examined the data, I considered the research questions; What does a storytelling curriculum offer the teacher? What does the storytelling curriculum offer the children? In my analysis, I found that the storytelling curriculum offered me as an educator opportunities to:

- assess the children's knowledge of their everyday world, their communication skills, their vocabulary and their ability to read social cues;
- begin to understand them as multifaceted people with a range of emotions, identities, interests and experiences, skills and abilities;

- involve them in their own learning;
- provide authentic opportunities for talking about conventions of print such as genre, voice, editing, time, and sequence; and
- I also learned that I could "cover" the curriculum and at the same time support an emergent curriculum.

In addition, I found that the storytelling curriculum allowed the children to:

- be engaged in play-based learning;
- experience authentic opportunities for rich language use;
- collaborate with their peers;
- experience and build social relationships;
- engage in purposeful problem solving;
- be involved in genuine meaningful and purposeful editing, writing, writing genres and retellings;
- gain deeper understanding of story and narrative; and
- engage in multimodal learning.

Regarding my third research question, I found adding the video camera to capture the story acting supported the children and myself in deeper learning about sequencing and editing. It also allowed me to observe, review and reflect on the stories and the children's understandings as I viewed and transcribed them and as the children and I viewed them. In reflecting on these findings, I believe a few of them stand out as particularly significant. In the next few pages I review these findings and then discuss what they might mean for other educators and stakeholders.

Opportunities for Authentic Assessment

One of the most significant things I learned in conducting this study was that children know a great deal, and that the story telling curriculum provided a very useful resource for helping me, as an educator, to assess what the children in my classroom already knew about a range of topics in a very authentic and unobtrusive way. I was continuously surprised by the opportunities that the storytelling activities provided for authentic assessment. I learned that children use the information they have and synthesize it to interpret stories and to create stories. This finding corroborates what Puckett and Black (1994) and Bodrova and Leong (2007) have reported in their research on authentic assessment. These researchers assert that teaching, learning, and assessing are continuous and interwoven and teachers need assessment tools that can help them support children's learning. In this research study, observation, conversation and reviewing the videos provided this opportunity. This finding also aligns with the findings of Binder (2011), Cooper (2005), and Riley and Burrell (2007) who propose that the storytelling curriculum lends itself to holistic, authentic assessment.

This finding is also similar to what was found by Wright, Bacigalupa, Black and Burton (2007), Cooper (2005), Ahn and Filipenko (2007), and Paley (1981). These researchers suggest that listening to children's stories can provide evidence of cognitive skills. As well, they remind us that authentic assessment is based on real life experiences, values growth and learning, and gives a well-rounded picture of the child that informs instruction. My findings are in accord with the findings of these earlier researchers.

In reflecting on my data I was also struck by the way that the storytelling curriculum as an tool for assessment and early literacy teaching provided a marked contrast to the kinds of tools and resources that are currently being used in the assessment of young children in my province. In many ways, working with the storytelling curriculum made it clear to me how limited these popular tools actually are. While we frequently use tools such as benchmarks, running records, grids with alphabet or sight words to check off, these checklists seem very removed from children's day-to-day experiences. Indeed, when contrasted with the storytelling curriculum, these tools seem to be a strange and arbitrary means to evaluate what the children know and what they can do. When I examined what the storytelling curriculum offered me as an educator, I could see that it provided me with multiple opportunities for authentic assessments of the children in a holistic way. In this context holistic refers to the whole child; physical, social, cognitive, and emotional. Children's growth and skills were documented throughout the process in my field notes and in the interpretation of the video transcripts. Further, their drawings and written work were kept on display and in their portfolios to be shared with the student and their families.

Opportunities for Early Literacy

In analyzing my data I found the storytelling curriculum was particularly useful as a window into the children's early literacy practices and that dramatic play can be an important componant of early literacy. Watching the children enact their own stories and their friends' stories helped me to discover what they already knew about the world around them, including what they knew about stories, and what they could do with language. This learning was reinforced through watching the video recordings. As I

observed these short dramas, I was able to see what prior knowledge the children brought to these everyday stories and how they synthesized this knowledge to interpret their friends' stories. I discovered what they knew, and what steps to take to further their understanding about language, representation and stories.

By listening carefully and observing closely, I could see that the children were living their stories, and that this informed their oral language use, their writing, and their drawing. In addition, the storytelling curriculum allowed me to see, and to seize, child initiated opportunities for early literacy. It allowed the children to explore the idea of narrative which, I have found, is generally their preferred genre, through oral language. In one instance, it also allowed us to explore procedural writing through an authentic experience and a desire to share that experience with others.

Throughout this project, I found sharing the videos of the dramas with the children allowed them to see what they already knew and provided very real opportunities to scaffold their knowledge about sequencing, time, editing, voice, writing genres and story building. In watching the videos the children gained a deeper understanding of their own stories and began to live the idea of narrative. Experience with telling and then acting the story brings deeper understanding than telling children about how to make a story. Their story is meaningful because it is theirs, not one chosen by the teacher and provides a motivation to tell, act, draw and write it. The process of transforming a story offers the children opportunities to make connections between words and actions. This is a lived experience with language; living the story. These experiences gave me an opportunity to validate the children and furnished them with an opportunity to develop their storytelling voices. These actions helped to build an

awareness of their place in the world, and allowed them to experience their stories as events that could elicit enthusiasm and excitement.

This finding echoes the research of Cooper (2007) and Jones and Reynolds (2011), who found that the story telling curriculum allowed teachers to scaffold children's literacy learning in areas such as oral language development and emergent understanding of narrative. As Cooper (2005) states: "The fact is, the very structure of stories and storytelling makes the experience a vital, fertile opportunity for young children to learn...about language, print and narrative"(p.237), thus confirming the value of storytelling curriculum to help children gain deeper understandings of elements of literacy.

However, I also found that the story telling curriculum offered opportunities for social interaction, collaboration, and problem solving. All these activities encourage oral language. This in turn, gave them experience creating narrative orally, that will in time become language that is written and read.

Oral language has been discussed and researched at length in the early years literature by Cooper (2009), New (2003), Roskos, Tabors and Lenhart (2009), Burke (2010) and Lockhart and Jones (2009). These researchers have found that play benefits literacy learning, that play allows for experimentation with language, and reinforces the understanding that oral language is a foundation to literacy. My findings parallel the findings reported by these researchers.

In reviewing my data, I also found that the storytelling curriculum easily supported many of the outcomes of the Provincial Kindergarten curriculum document.

According to the Kindergarten Integrated Curriculum (PEI , 2008), Speaking and Listening outcomes for early literacy are listed as: (1.1) Express feelings and opinions and describe personal experiences and interests; (1.2) Listen to the ideas and opinions of others; (1.4) Follow and give directions in different contexts; (1.5) Participate in conversation[small and whole group]; (1.6) Begin to use gestures and tone to convey meaning; (1.7) Engage in simple oral presentations; (1.8) Demonstrate that they are becoming aware of social conventions in group work and cooperative play. These outcomes are very similar to those addressed in the storytelling curriculum literature (Cooper, 2005). Writing and Representing outcomes can also be addressed using a storytelling curriculum in the context of children's stories. The Kindergarten Integrated Curriculum (2008) proposes a balanced approach to early literacy that calls for a variety of approaches to teaching oral language, phonological awareness, reading and viewing , writing and representing. That this balanced approach can be developed using children's own everyday stories as a base aligns with the findings of Cooper (2005) and Stadler and Ward (2005) who examined the storytelling curriculum as a play-based opportunity for exploring literacy curriculum, and found that children developed stronger oral narrative skills and experienced a natural opportunity for exposure to elements of balanced literacy.

Opportunities for Emergent Curriculum

In thinking about what I learned while using the storytelling curriculum, I was also struck by how well the storytelling curriculum helped support me in allowing an emergent curriculum to evolve simultaneously. For the past several years, I have been working towards being a practitioner of emergent curriculum in my classroom. Research

on young children's learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Burke, 2010; Cooper, 2005; Katz & Chard, 2000; Wells,1999) repeatedly emphasizes the importance of acknowledging children's interests and their lived experience to involve them in their own learning. Similarly, Carter and Curtis (2008) agree that acknowledging the child's interest and reflecting these back to him/her is a powerful learning tool.

Building a curriculum with the children's experiences and interests in mind and in the context of daily interactions is known as creating an emergent curriculum (Stacey, 2009). This kind of curriculum can be contrasted with the kind that is delivered to an educator from a writer who is far removed from the daily life of her specific classroom. The storytelling curriculum is an ideal vehicle for supporting emergent curriculum as it provides a space for children to share their interests and for the teacher to acknowledge them (Cooper, 2009; Paley, 2004). It also creates a culture of listening to each other so we can create the dramatization together. This builds confidence and contributes to a learning community. I can see the children beam as they become more confident in the storyteller's chair. I can see the class lean into the story. The incentive to listen is strong as this is something that comes from them. The children are involved in their own learning and this is the heart of an emergent curriculum.

Emergent curriculum uses observations, listening to conversations and often includes taking photos to document and promote learning (Stacey, 2009). Using the video camera documents the stories and mirrors them for children to extend their learning. The element of reflection is an attribute of the emergent curriculum that "permeates their daily routines"(New, 1998. p. 275) and is essential to the role of teacher and students creating a cycle of inquiry that fuels knowledge construction, relationship building, and communication to name a few. These elements were certainly present in

the implementation of our story telling and acting. In reviewing the process of this research, I felt that the storytelling curriculum and the use of the video camera offered me tremendous support in becoming the reflective and responsive educator I want to be. These tools provided unique support to designing emergent curriculum in my classroom.

Opportunities for Play

In analyzing the data, I found the storytelling curriculum allowed the children to do many things. However, one of the most important things that adding the storytelling curriculum to our classroom seemed to do was that it allowed the children to play, and it legitimated a kind of whole group play. As has been argued by a wide range of scholars for the past few decades, play must be an integral part of the early childhood classroom (Bruner,1983; Burke, 2010; Moyles, 1994; Paley, 2004; Vygotsky, 1972). Play is children's work and as such it can promote social learning and facilitate cognitive development (Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Moyles, 2010; Paley, 2004). Play is important in the early years because it allows children to construct knowledge based on their experience.

However, while researchers has argue that play is crucial to children's development, and the government states we are to offer a "play-based curriculum" (DEECD, 2010), and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale- Revised (ECERS-R)(Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005) proposes that children in an eight hour program should have at least one hour of free play daily, creating a space and time for play in the modern Kindergarten classroom is not easy. As argued by Cooper (2009), Moyles (2010), and Jones and Reynolds (2011), play in the kindergarten classroom is being

eroded to make way for the skills-based learning or direct instruction that is advocated by policy makers and school boards throughout North America.

I have seen this in my own classroom particularly as we moved into the school system. The large blocks of uninterrupted time that we had before Kindergarten became a part of the school system have disappeared. Our days are now divided into 30 or 40 minute periods in order to accommodate the elementary school program. This kind of shift makes it extremely difficult for the children to have time to really play. In the course of a day in the public system, children have designated times to play usually in 20 minute blocks. In observing my students at recess I note that twenty minutes is just enough time to initiate a game, but not usually enough time to actually play it. In my experience children are often planning what they will play outside while they are inside getting ready, and during their inside work time. Wisely, they make efficient use of their time planning inside, so that the outside play time is all for the game. Of course, this is not the expectation for most teachers who would often like inside time to be spent "learning" or completing work before play time.

In noting this contrast, I cannot help but imagine: what if the curriculum and the play were integrated? My sense is the planning and the play would become a classroom activity with positive outcomes that could be plugged into the kindergarten integrated curriculum for social studies, literacy, creative development and the like. This would be a powerful space for inspired learning grounded in play and fulfilling the expectation for a play-based curriculum.

In examining the data I collected during the study, I found the storytelling curriculum invited the children to participate in child-initiated, spontaneous play in the classroom. By creating a space for play-like activity during the dramatization of the stories, the children added to their already rich imaginative ideas for what to do during the center time and outdoor play time. This addition could be seen particularly when the students would spontaneously ask to act out a story together and I would scurry to find the video camera.

Opportunities for Multimodal Expression

In examining the data, I found that the storytelling curriculum involved the children so actively that the play was multimodal, that is, it drew on many expressive modalities such as auditory, visual, and gesture. Young children rely on their five senses and are exquisitely tuned to do so. Play, through the storytelling curriculum, provided an opportunity for them to use their five senses and promoted emotional and social growth. This finding is also reported by Binder (2014), Kendrick (2005), and Paley (2004), who assert that human communication is comprised of multiple modes and "play marks out a pathway to learning" (Paley, 2004. p.33). Because the storytelling curriculum is multimodal, the children were given the opportunity to learn through all their senses and to respond to learning in more than one modality. As argued by Harrett and Benjamin (2005), it is important to "be aware of different modes of literacy" and modes of learning, as we have moved, as a culture, well beyond "book based literacy" (p.41). Similarly, if we respond to the "hundred languages of children" (Malaguzzi in Edwards, Gandini, & Forman,1998) which are beyond alphabetic print, and certainly include multimodal experiences, then the storytelling curriculum can offer children many ways

to approach learning and literacy. The storytelling curriculum was a multimodal experience. Therefore, it offered many opportunities for me to scaffold the children's learning in different modes such as kinetic, interpreting body language, aural, listening to others, speaking, using oral language ,interpersonal, responding to others. As argued by Lazear (2008), the more ways children can access learning, the more chance they have of understanding it .

Opportunities for Building Relationships

In this study, I found that the storytelling curriculum offered the children multiple opportunities to build relationships with people and things through play. Children can build relationships through interacting, listening, speaking, and interpreting during the dramatizations. Malaguzzi suggests that "Relationship is a necessity of life" (Loris Malaguzzi in Edwards, Gandini, & Forman,1998. p.287). These relationships are allowed to unfold among children and between teacher and child during storytelling and story acting (Stacey, 2009). Children require interactions to develop and grow; they need conversation and collaboration to practice oral language and develop problem solving skills.

Through telling everyday stories about something children know about and have experienced, the children were given multiple opportunities to feel successful. This was a powerful outcome of this study for me. By beginning with what they can do – talk and pretend – the storytelling curriculum provides ample opportunity for recognizing the children as competent, interesting individuals with remarkable life experiences.

Researchers have established that children enjoy storytelling but that most of all story acting "effectively integrates a significant play element into the activity --not only in terms of the symbolic and social-relational involvement in narrative enactment itself, but also in terms of other kinds of peer interactions that typically accompany social pretend play" (Nicolopoulou et al., 2010, p.47). The children are involved in their own learning and are creating a learning community.

Through analyzing the data I saw that the children had many opportunities to collaborate during the story acting. This is similar to what is reported by Nicolopoulou, et al. (2010). I noticed the children working together to solve the problem of how to be a bowl. They interacted using their social skills when selecting actors in the stories. When a problem arose such as how to “blow to pieces” they used language to help a friend. I saw them create a tractor with a lever and a loader and a hitch to pull a wagon. All of these parts were children working together to make a machine. What a magnificent improvisation based on their prior knowledge of tractors, hitches, and loaders. They collaborated to create it and they had to problem solve to get the correct working parts and then move together as one to make the machine work. This is remarkable "know how" and cannot be acknowledged or observed in a list of sight words or a comprehension guide. I can however, show them the video of their machine and we can see over again how they had to collaborate and problem solve to make a tractor out of people.

Conclusion

The findings from this project suggest that the Storytelling Curriculum may be an immensely valuable tool for Kindergarten teachers. As I have outlined in the previous

chapters, the Storytelling Curriculum has much to offer both educators and children. Educators can effectively meet the demands of early literacy outcomes with this play-based, multimodal, curriculum with the added advantage of authentic assessment of language use, as well as social and cognitive domains. In this way, the findings of this study have implications for administrators, school boards, ministries or departments of education and for faculties of education. In the following sections I outline these implications.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest the storytelling curriculum offers another option to popular early years assessments like the Benchmark Assessment Series (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). In contrast, the literacy assessment tools frequently used in early years classrooms to garner knowledge of what the children know about language, like the Phonemic Awareness Skills Test (PAST), seem severely limited in comparison. This finding echoes Carter and Curtis (2008) who argue that "checklists have limited value because they fail to acknowledge the complexity of the learning process" (p.190) and that assessments must reflect how the children play and work, as well as indicate how they are thinking in order to represent children's learning. In using the storytelling curriculum, I felt I was being given valuable insight into the children's ability to communicate, represent and problem solve. This information felt far more useful to me than the commonly used and generally recommended literacy assessment tools.

The findings from this study also offer possibilities to administrators. Administrators are constantly looking for inexpensive and simple ways to support their staff in delivering child-centered play-based learning while meeting curriculum

expectations. The storytelling curriculum offers an ideal way to deliver early literacy with lower elementary students and more developed literacy with older students with little or no impact on classroom schedules and little to no financial cost (Cooper, 2009). The findings of this study suggest administrators could highlight the use of the storytelling curriculum to advocate developmentally appropriate instruction, play-based and child-centered learning. This study revealed the benefit of integrating play and literacy through the story telling curriculum at little or no expense.

The findings from this project offer school boards an inexpensive and engaging resource for developing early literacy (Cooper, 2009). Literacy coaches employed by School Boards could be trained to educate teachers in the benefits of the story telling curriculum for teaching literacy objectives throughout elementary grades in schools they service. In offering workshops and training in the storytelling curriculum, school boards could be recognize and promote the benefits of a storytelling curriculum to learning and literacy, as the findings of the research suggest that the storytelling curriculum allows assessment of the whole child and allows the teacher to recognize where the student is, and where s/he needs to go.

The findings from this project offer the Department of Education an opportunity to support and promote the delivery of the storytelling curriculum, first by acknowledging it as a viable method to teach literacy by valuing oral language. And second, by training literacy specialists in the implementation of the storytelling curriculum and its benefits for teaching a literacy curriculum in an integrated, holistic manner. This implication could be realized by offering professional development in the benefits of the storytelling curriculum for teachers in elementary classrooms. Again, the

findings show that this is an inexpensive and engaging resource that supports the play-based learning environment promoted by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

In recognizing the findings of this study, Faculties of Education could explore teaching the storytelling curriculum as a part of their Bachelor of Education literacy courses and graduate courses on literacy education. Adding attention to the storytelling curriculum would help new teachers learn the value of children's literacy learning through oral language and play, and could give experienced teachers another useful tool for supporting their students' literacy learning. For beginning and experienced teachers, this curriculum is inexpensive and uncomplicated. It could help minimize management challenges because it is interest based and engages children. It could provide useful insights into children's thinking and next steps for learning in an integrated, multi-modal approach to literacy.

Further Study

This research was presented at the Prince Edward Island Teachers Federation convention in the Fall of 2013. There was substantial interest in using the storytelling curriculum in French Immersion classrooms for the same reasons it works in English classrooms. Children are motivated to tell their own stories and to act them out using oral language, in this instance, learning to use the French language. Teachers can offer child-centered learning and assess where their students are to scaffold their learning and nudge them forward in their use of oral French.

In addition, extending the use of this curriculum beyond the early years could enhance narrative skills for older learners struggling with writing and reading and promote the same kind of reflective and responsive teaching in upper elementary grades. This presents an area of potential further study. Future researchers may be interested to explore what the storytelling curriculum might offer children and teachers in older grades.

Similarly, although this study was conducted in a rural school and the majority of the existing studies were conducted in urban schools, it was outside the scope of this study to examine how the storytelling curriculum might specifically benefit rural students. While many rural children come to school with different experiences with oral and print language than do urban children, little research has investigated how tools like the storytelling curriculum may act as a bridge to alphabetic print literacy for rural children. Future researchers may find it useful to investigate the role that socio-cultural contexts such as rural/urban location may play on the use of the storytelling curriculum.

Final Thoughts

Reflection is key to this curriculum. It can benefit the teacher's understanding of the students through providing insight into how they think, react, and synthesize prior knowledge. The teacher can implement intentional instruction to specific needs of her students. "Observation, reflection, action" (Carter & Curtis, 2008. p17) are key for teachers who can respond to the physical social, intellectual, creative needs of their students. This thread was clarified for me in the many viewings of the video data I

collected. One of the most vital reflections for me was how this curriculum was clearly rooted in the interests of the children.

Woven mat

I found many strands developing in the storytelling curriculum that wove a dense, integrated" language mat", incorporating elements of early literacy, community building, problem solving, meaningful writing opportunities, oral language use, all in a beautifully engaging, child-centered activity in which the children were eager to participate. Children were involved in their own experience-based learning with its roots in play. The storytelling curriculum was a vehicle for language building as it provided an authentic venue for speaking and listening. One that was based on the interests of the children. One that is highly motivating. One in which the child is engaged in his/her own learning. One in which the teacher can observe and make authentic assessments. One where a teacher can learn so much more than how many letters can a child write, or how many letter sounds a child understands. Teachers would learn how their students think, and how they construct knowledge from experiences they have had, and how they synthesize this knowledge to interpret the stories of their friend. It is rich and dense with information about the whole child. The storytelling curriculum can offer teachers and children many facets of holistic learning and as well meet curriculum outcomes. It allows children and teachers to experience learning about language, themselves, and each other in an organic way. Teachers can implement the checklists and rubrics after they have used the storytelling curriculum. In this way the teacher can gain insights into children's thinking, acknowledge them as people and scaffold their learning in meaningful ways.

I found that this action research project allowed me to know my students in a real sense. It allowed me a window into their thinking. I loved getting to know them and have never experienced such a rich relationship with my students in all the years I have taught. This past academic year, as I spent time writing my thesis, I missed using the storytelling curriculum and knowing my students in the deep and meaningful way that I had done with the storytelling curriculum and the hours of reviewing the videos. I look forward to using the storytelling curriculum again in the coming year to motivate students, engage children in play, problem solving, collaborating, hearing and learning from each other.

In conclusion, using the storytelling curriculum has multiple rewards for a child-centered teaching of literacy, authentic assessment and having fun, I invite other educators, in kindergarten and beyond to discover for themselves the benefits of using this inexpensive, engaging teaching tool.

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Appendix A: Letter of Information to Parents

Date

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am doing an action research project for my Master of Education thesis involving a "storytelling curriculum" (Paley,1980) to help children explore and improve oral language skills. I am involved in this research to improve my teaching and to fulfill a requirement for the Master of Education at University of Prince Edward Island. My thesis advisors are Dr. Martha Gabriel and Dr. Carla DiGiorgio at the University of Prince Edward Island. This type of research could make a significant contribution to the use of oral language in the kindergarten curriculum and make a positive argument for play-based learning in kindergarten. The findings could be pertinent to other early childhood educators and can make a significant contribution to the discipline of elementary education in general. I plan to disseminate the findings to the thesis defense panel, lower elementary staff at Garden of the Gulf School and, to Early Childhood Development Association members as well as possible publication in relevant professional journals.

The research is focused on kindergarten students in my classroom at Garden of the Gulf School located in North Rustico, PE. For this study initially children will be asked to gather stories from home about their naming to tell the class. Children will illustrate and write this story. Next they will gather a story from home about a family

outing(based on a photograph you will provide) they will tell to the class. We will then dramatize the story with and for classmates. Children will illustrate and write the story. Finally they will tell a story of their own which I will scribe (write for them), which we will dramatize with and for the class. Then students will illustrate and write the story. The purpose of the project is to inform my own practice as to how to improve literacy development through storytelling and play-based activities (dramatizations) by developing and practising oral language skills.

The time commitment for this project is approximately 8o minutes per child over a period of two and a half months (October-December). This includes, telling, dramatizing, drawing and writing each story. Your time commitment is about five -ten minutes to tell the" naming story" one week and the" family outing" story the next week.

I will be documenting the storytelling, dramatizations and representations with still photographs and video photography as well as audio-taping the storytellings. These photos, videos, audio tapes, drawings and writings will be used as data for my study. The results will be shared with you in your child's portfolio and at a Family Night Social. Children's work will be displayed in the room and in the hallway outside the kindergarten class room during the months of October through December.

You and your child are invited to participate in this storytelling project starting in the month of October. You and your child's participation is voluntary. You and your child may choose to end participation at any time without consequences. Due to the nature of the study and its location in the classroom I cannot ensure confidentiality as other students and parents may recognize your child in the photos and the retelling of

stories in the class. I will ,however, use pseudonyms in the final analysis for the thesis. The results of this project may be shared at a family social evening if you are willing.

The benefits of this action research project will be to me as a kindergarten teacher in improving my practice in the realm of literacy. Your child will benefit from increased literacy awareness and anticipated improvement in their oral, written , and visual language development. This activity helps build relationships and advocates oral language as a base for other forms of literacy. You too may benefit from having a special story sharing time which enhances your role as your child's first teacher.

If you should have any questions regarding this research please contact me Melissa Brownlow, at (902) 963-7810 or by e-mail at mjbrownlow@edu.pe.ca. You may also contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902) 620-5104, or by e-mail at lynmacdonald@upei.ca if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study. Thank you for your collaboration,

Sincerely, Melissa Brownlow

Appendix B: Consent Form

Title of Study: Stories in School: How Does a Storytelling Curriculum Engage Kindergarten Age Children in Play and Encourage Oral Language and Impact Literacy Development ?

Principal Investigator: Melissa Brownlow

To: Parents /Guardians of Kindergarten Students and Kindergarten Students,

I would like to invite you to participate in the action research project I will be conducting as part of research for my Master of Education thesis. I will be investigating storytelling and its impact on oral language use as a foundation to writing and drawing in our kindergarten classroom. Participants of the study will include kindergarten students in my class at Garden of the Gulf School and to a smaller degree parents who will be sharing stories about how their child was named and a family outing. The students will not be asked anything above and beyond what they are already doing in our classroom (retelling, drawing, writing). The purpose of the study is to identify the impact of oral language use on children's drawing and writing.

There are essentially no risks involved in this action research project. The purpose is to inform and improve my own practice as a kindergarten teacher. Students will not be asked to do any additional work as a result of the study. The benefit of

conducting the research is the knowledge I will gain to inform my own practice in my role as teacher of literacy to kindergarten children

Please know that you are free to accept or decline the invitation for your child and you to participate in this action research project.

If you do consent, please note that you are acknowledging the following:

__I understand my participation is voluntary.

__ I have the freedom to withdraw at anytime without consequence.

__I understand that the researcher's observations will be shared with parents and that the children's work and photos will be displayed at the school and that data will be used for thesis defense and publication in the future. Specifically, there will be video recording of students and this video will be used for instructional purposes and for presentation of results to various audiences to promote the research study

__I understand my child's work will be used for final data analysis for the thesis and will be shared at the thesis defence and at a family social.

__I understand I can keep a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

__I understand that I can contact UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902) 620-5104, or by e-mail at lynmacdonald@upei.ca if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study.

__ I have read and understand the material in the information letter.

__I give my consent for my child to participate in this study.

_____

Name of Parent

_____

Name of Child

_____

Parent Signature

_____

Signature of Researcher

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Melissa Brownlow

Kindergarten Teacher

Master of Education Student, UPEI

Appendix C: Letter To Request Permission To Conduct Research

Dear Ms. Ready

I am writing to request permission to conduct research in my kindergarten classroom. This research is to fulfill a requirement for a Master's in Education thesis.

This research will involve a storytelling curriculum (Paley, 1981). My goal is to scaffold the oral language of kindergarten children . The research will examine the impact of the oral language on the children's literacy development.

The research will be conducted over a period of eight to ten weeks in the fall of the school year 2012-2013. I t will be conducted in my kindergarten classroom with the purpose of improving my teaching in the area of literacy. This research supports the Kindergarten Integrated Curriculum for Social Studies and Literacy.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Melissa Brownlow

Kindergarten Teacher

Master of Education Student, UPEI